

What We Believe

Article 8 of 13: The Justification of Sinners

8. **The Justification of Sinners:** We believe that Christ, by His obedience and death, fully discharged the debt of all those who are justified. By His sacrifice, He bore in our stead the punishment due us for our sins, making a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice on our behalf. By His perfect obedience He satisfied the just demands of God on our behalf, since by faith alone that perfect obedience is credited to all who trust in Christ alone for their acceptance with God. Inasmuch as Christ was given by the Father for us, and his obedience and punishment were accepted in place of our own, freely and not for anything in us, this justification is solely of free grace, in order that both the exact justice and the rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners. We believe that a zeal for personal and public obedience flows from this free justification.

Continuing along through Creation / Fall / Redemption

In this article we continue along the lines of creation/fall/redemption, particularly with redemption. Last article we focused on redemption accomplished in the work of Christ on the cross and His resurrection. In this article we begin to focus on redemption applied to individuals as we will be concentrating on the very crucial doctrine of justification.

Justification – Where to begin? The Extreme Importance of this Doctrine.

How can a sinful person be in right standing with a holy God? The Scriptures teach us that God is completely holy, righteous and just, and requires perfection from His creatures. Unfortunately since the fall, humanity is unable to accomplish this perfection and fall short of His glory. As sinful human beings, the guilt of our sin debt inherited from Adam, called Original Sin, and our own subsequent acts of rebellion we have personally added on to our record, stand against us as an indictment in the high court of heaven. Only by the free grace of God through faith in the merits of Jesus Christ Himself, eternal God and perfect human, can we as sinful humans ever hope to have acceptance, forgiveness, and right standing with such a holy God. We cannot over emphasize the extreme importance of this essential truth of our faith. It has been said that with this truth, the Church stands or falls. As we attempt to try to understand the meaning of this essential doctrine of our faith, we need to begin in our search for understanding with what the Bible says, starting with the meanings of the original words used in both the Old and New Testaments. After all, it is what these original words mean and how they were used that will ultimately help us to determine the true Biblical doctrine of justification.

Justification in the O.T.

The Words

The Hebrew term for “justify” is *tsadaq*, and according to theologian Louis Berkhof means to be declared just in accordance with the law:

“... in the great majority of cases means "to be declared judicially that one's state is in harmony with the demands of the law," - Exodus 23:7; Deuteronomy 25:1; Proverbs 17:15; Isaiah 5:23. The meaning of these words is therefore strictly forensic or legal.” Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p 511

He goes on to argue that this is the case when the word is considered in relation to the concept of condemnation. Further, he asserts although there are a few passages where the word means more than simply “to declare righteous”, it still does not mean “to make good or holy”. We will see the importance of this later.

Development of the Concept of Justification

As we have developed in previous articles, God began to reveal the Gospel as early as Genesis 3:15, where He promised that the seed of the woman, Christ, would prevail against the serpent, the devil. He continued to reveal His redemptive promises from there on. Noah was called a “righteous” man in Genesis 6:9, Job was called “upright” in Job 1:1, but the concept of justification, or right standing with God, was not as clearly emphasized until Abraham. God called Abraham out of gentile paganism to form the

“Abraham believed God and
it was accounted unto him
as righteousness.”

Gen. 15:6



Hebrew people, through whom Jesus the Messiah would come. God entered into covenant relationship with Abraham and he responded to God through faith. We are told of Abraham,

“and he believed God, and it was accounted unto him as righteousness.” Genesis 15:6

So the concept of justification, right standing with God, began to be more fully revealed in God’s relationship with Abraham. God reckoned Abraham as righteous through his faith in God’s promises. King David expanded on this concept, writing of justification, in the Psalms:

“Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.” Ps. 32:1, 2

We will look at a few important words related to justification: account, impute and reckon below. God promised through the prophet Jeremiah, that a time would come when He would establish a New Covenant with His people. One of the benefits of this covenant would be sins forgiven:

“I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” Jeremiah 31:34

The Just Shall Live by Faith

The prophet Habakkuk wrote in approximately 600 B.C. in a time of crisis. For the nation a time of spiritual struggle, for the known world a time of upheaval. In chapter 2 of his prophecies, we read what is called the theme of his short prophetic book:

“. . . the righteous shall live by his faith.” Habakkuk 2:4



The Apostle Paul quotes Habakkuk in Romans ch. 1 and King David in ch. 4 as we will see below. Concerning justification in the O.T., The Zondervan Encyclopedia says,

“it has been said that justification by faith is only a New Testament doctrine or only Pauline theology. In reality, however, justification by faith is derived from the Old Testament and simply spelled out in greater detail in the New Testament under various pictures. In both Hebrew and Greek the words, justification, and righteousness, and related terms have a common background. The Septuagint uses the same Greek terms as the New Testament. Paul did not invent either the words or their contents. From his epistles, we know that Paul was acquainted with both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek Septuagint well.”
Zondervan Pictorial Enc. Vol. 3 page 769

Justification in the N.T.

As we just noted, the concept of justification receives more direct attention in the N.T. Remember that God’s revelation is progressive. He has revealed more and more on particular truths and doctrines as redemptive history has unfolded. It is reasonable to expect that the doctrine of justification is more fully revealed in the N.T. than the O.T.

The Words

In the New Testament there is a family of related terms used for the concept of justification in salvation. According to Berkhof, the verb *dikaioo* generally means,

"to declare a person to be just." Occasionally it refers to a personal declaration that one's moral character is in conformity with the law, Matthew 12:37; Luke 7:29; Romans 3:4. In the epistles of Paul the sole logical meaning of the term is clearly in the foreground. It is "to declare forensically that the demands of the law as a condition of life are fully satisfied with regard to a person," Acts 13:39; Romans 5:1,9; 8:30 - 33; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Galatians 2:16; 3:11. Berkhof, Sys. Theol., p 509

Berkhof goes on to argue just as with the Hebrew term *tsadaq*, the forensic meaning is proved as it is used antithetically in relation to the word “condemnation” (Romans 8:33, 34) and other equivalent expressions that convey judicial or legal ideas (John 3:18; 5:24; Romans 4:6, 7; 2 Corinthians 5:19), and if it does not have this forensic meaning, then there is no real distinction between justification and sanctification. The word “forensic” pertains to law courts, and can be used as synonymous with the word “legal”. We will take up this question below as we will see the striking difference between the Roman Catholic view and the Biblical/Reformation view.

Concerning the word *dikaioo*, Berkhof reasons:

“This word, connected with the verb just discussed, is peculiar in that it never expresses what the thing is in itself, but always what it is in relation to something else, to some standard outside of it, to which it ought to correspond. . . . In Scripture a man is called *dikaioo* when, in the judgment of God, his relation to the law is what it ought to be, or when his life is such as is required by his judicial relation to God. This may include the idea that he is good, but only from a certain point of view, namely, that of his judicial relationship to God.” Louis Berkhof, Systemic Theology, p. 509

Next, concerning the word *dikaiosis*, he writes:

“This is found only in two places in the New Testament, namely, Romans 4:25; 5:18. It talks of God's declaring men free from guilt and acceptable to him.” Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 509

Finally he writes:

“The resulting idea of justification. ‘To justify’ in the scriptural sense of the word, is to expect an objective relation, the state of righteousness, by a judicial sentence. This can be done in a twofold way: a) by bringing into account the actual subjective condition of a person (to justify the just or the righteous), James 2:21; or b) by imputing to a person the righteousness of another, that is, by accounting him righteous though he is inwardly unrighteous. The latter is the usual sense of justification in the New Testament.” Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 511

Justification – Just what is it?

Just what is justification after all? You have probably heard a preacher or teacher or just another Christian answer the question, “What does it mean to be justified?” “Justification, oh yeah, that means that since I accepted Jesus, it’s - *‘just-if-i’d - never sinned’* - , right?”. As we have noted in previous articles, sometimes when well-meaning individuals use “catchy” phrases and sayings in an uncaring way, the truth suffers. Misunderstandings and confusion can abound. This is not a great representation of the Biblical doctrine of justification. We will come back to this later. Within the doctrine of salvation, justification has to do with our right standing with God. How can a sinful person be right with and acceptable in the sight of a holy God?

R.C. Sproul has defined justification like this:

“Justification may be defined as that act by which unjust sinners are made right in the sight of a just and holy God. The supreme need of unjust persons is righteousness. It is the lack of righteousness that is supplied by Christ on behalf of the believing sinner. . . As Paul puts it, “by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in his sight”, Romans 3:20. Justification is forensic. That is, we are declared, counted, or reckoned to be righteous when God imputes the righteousness of Christ to our account. The necessary condition for this is faith.”

R.C. Sproul, *Central Truths of the Christian Faith*, p. 189, *Justification by Faith*

Justification is at the “core” of the Gospel – The Just shall always live by faith!

What God revealed and promised through the O.T. prophet Habbakuk, the Apostle Paul drives home as central, indeed essential to the Gospel, which is the power of God for salvation:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”” Romans 1:16, 17

Let’s pause here for a moment and ask the question, What is faith? Faith comes from the Greek, *pistis*, a strong conviction about the truth of something, a belief. To trust in something or someone. In the verb form, *pisteno*, it generally means to think to be true, to be persuaded of, to credit, place confidence in. Faith has content, knowledge of an object or a person, it entails thinking or mentally assenting that that knowledge is true, and finally personally placing one’s confidence or trust in the object believed in. See Grudem, *Sys. Th.*, p 709, 710 and Sproul, *Faith Alone*, p. 75-88.

Justification is a Legal Declaration by God – Not Guilty but Righteous

If you remember our catchy phrase above, “*just-if-I-i’d never sinned*”, we said that it is not really true of the Biblical doctrine of justification. The following is the reason why. If that were true, we would remain limited to mere human righteousness, whereas, with Biblical justification through Christ, our sins are forgiven, we are declared not guilty, but in addition, we receive no less than the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ credited to us, who by nature is fully God and fully man. Can you see how much greater this is? What an awesome blessing! Guilty sinners have the perfect righteousness of Christ, the God-Man, credited to our eternal account by grace through faith apart from and works of our own. Grudem writes that justification includes a legal declaration by God and it is when a person is declared not guilty:

“The use of the word justify in the Bible indicates that justification is a legal declaration by God. The verb justify in the New Testament, the Greek, *diakaioo*, has a range of meanings but a very common sense is ‘to declare righteous.’ This sense is particularly evident, for example, in Romans 4:5, ‘and to one who does not work but trust him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.’ Here Paul cannot mean that God makes the ungodly to be righteous by changing them internally and making them morally perfect, for then they would have merit or works of their

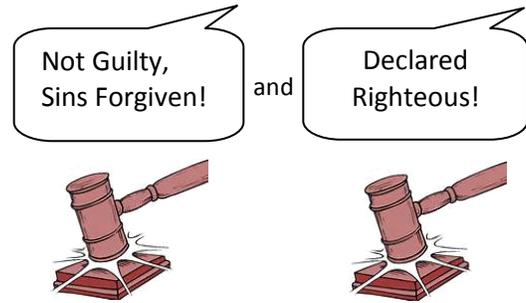
own to depend on. Rather, he means that God declares the ungodly to be righteous in his sight, not on the basis of their good works, but in response to their faith.” Wayne Grudem, Sys. Th. p. 723

“Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.”

Romans 4:4-5

The Twin Gavels of Justification

It is like observing in the high court of heaven and a sinner by God’s grace, repents and believes in Christ in response to the Gospel. God the righteous Judge and Justifier corresponds to this act of faith by striking as it were a metaphorical gavel, and declaring the person “Not Guilty”! And again, striking the gavel a second time, declaring, “Righteous in My sight!”



Justification Contrasted with Condemnation

The beauty of justification by grace through faith in Christ alone may be better admired when contrasted with the Biblical concept of condemnation. To condemn someone is to declare that person guilty and deserving of punishment. The opposite of condemnation is justification.

“The idea that justification is a legal declaration is quite evident also when justification is contrasted with condemnation. Paul says, “who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn?”, Romans 8:33 - 34. To condemn someone is to declare that person guilty. The opposite of condemnation is justification, which, in this context, must mean to declare someone not guilty. This is also evident from the fact that God’s act of justifying is given as Paul’s answer to the possibility of someone bringing an accusation or charge against God’s people: such a declaration of guilt cannot stand in the face of God’s declaration of righteousness.”

Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, p. 723

You have probably heard an evangelist say, “God will judge you by what you do with Jesus”. This statement seems to put the lost person in some neutral position. We know Scriptures says that the lost are at enmity with God. It seems, however, that Jesus taught that the unbeliever stands essentially condemned already, because of their stubborn, natural unbelief.

“whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” **John 3:18**

This statement is only two verses after Jesus’ statement that God so loved the world, He gave His one unique Son, that all those who believe in Him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16. Scripture also teaches us that we were all “born children of wrath.” Ephesians 2:3

So, in light of these Scriptures, it is likely more Biblical to say to the lost, “Friend, you are under God’s judgment/condemnation, unless you repent and believe in Jesus”.

This can also be characterized as either being outside of Christ or being in Christ.

Outside of Christ - “as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.’ ‘Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.’ ‘The venom of asps is under their lips.’ ‘Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.’ ‘Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.’ ‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’” Romans 3:10-18

In Christ - “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.” Romans 3:21-25

The Great Exchange – Imputation of Righteousness

In Justification, we need to realize that since it is a legal declaration by God, certain words like account, reckon, credit, impute, etc., become very important for us to understand.

To “account” or “count as”, can mean to think of as or to consider as.

To “reckon”, much like account, can mean to count as, think of as, to consider as.

To “credit”, to apply or put to one’s account.

To “impute”, can mean to credit to or attribute to a person.

Grudem says concerning the meaning of the word impute:

“To think of as belonging to someone, and therefore to cause it to belong to that person. God ‘thinks of Adam’s sin as belonging to us, and it therefore belongs to us, and in justification he thinks of Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us and so relates to us on this basis.”

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology, Glossary*, p. 1244

Sproul wrote:

“When Paul explains the doctrine of justification, he cites the example of the patriarch Abraham. He writes: ‘For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness (Rom 4:3, citing Gen. 15:6). In other words, Abraham had faith, and therefore God justified him. Abraham was still a sinner. The rest of the history of the life of Abraham reveals that he did not always obey God. Nevertheless, God counted him as righteous because he believed in the promise God had made to him. This is an example of imputation, which involves transferring something legally to someone’s account, to reckon something to be there. So, Paul speaks of God counting Abraham as righteous or reckoning him as righteous, even though, in and of himself, Abraham was not yet righteous. He did not have righteousness inhering in him.”

R.C. Sproul, *Are We Together?* p.43

What do these words bring to our understanding of Justification? In effect then, when we say that God “justifies” someone, we are saying that He forgives their sin debt, but there is another major facet to this amazing transaction. God accounts, reckons, credits or imputes the very righteousness of Jesus Christ to that person. What occurs has been called “The Great Exchange”:

“In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.”
2 Corinthians 5:19

“The reconciliation of the relationship between God and sinners is a result of forgiveness and is seen in this verse as finally connected with his not counting, or not imputing, Christians’ sins against them. The non-charging of sin to the believer, like charging, or imputing, it to Christ instead, demonstrates the first part of the great exchange. Paul develops this thought in the first part of 2 Corinthians 5:21, where he declares, ‘for our sake God made Christ to be sin who knew no sin.’ God did this. And he did it for our sake out of his infinite love. This sinless Christ made to be sin, a demonstration of the very essence of imputation. . . . Christ, in essence, assumed the sinner’s identity; he became the Christian’s sin substitute. We see the second part of the great exchange in the latter half of the verse: “so that in Christ we might become the righteousness of God” 2 Corinthians 5:20 1b. Once they are in Christ, sinners become the righteousness of God, because God credits or imputes Christ’s perfect righteousness to them. In the eyes of God, these sinners have fulfilled the requirements of the law because the Sinless One fulfilled the law on their behalf by his perfect life in obedience death on the cross; they are, in effect, clothed in Christ’s righteousness . . . In an overwhelming miracle of grace, in God’s eyes the sinners have taken on Christ’s identity - they are equally as righteous as Christ himself. Thus, the great exchange that results from the death of the perfect sacrifice is a twofold substitution: the charging of the believer’s sin to Christ results in God’s forgiveness, and accrediting of Christ’s righteousness to the believer results in his justification. More than being declared not guilty, in Christ believers are actually declared righteous. Redeemed sinners and their Christ have traded places. This is a glorious transaction. If this is not the best news of all time, what is? . . .”

Jerry Bridges & Bob Bevinon, *The Great Exchange*, p. 40, 41

Double Imputation

So in Biblical justification, we have a “double” imputation. Our sins are laid on Christ, and His righteousness is credited to our account. Our unrighteous is laid on Him and we



are clothed in His perfect righteousness just like being draped in a robe of the perfect righteousness of our Savior. Truly magnificent!

Justification by the Free Grace of God “Sola Gratia” – Grace Alone

According to Ephesians 2:8, salvation, including justification is by the free grace of God apart from works or merits of our own, but is a gift. Grace as we have emphasized in previous articles, basically means “unearned” or “unmerited favor”. Scripture clearly puts grace in contrast to merit when it pertains to salvation and justification. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 3:23, 24:

“they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.”

The NIV translates this as “justified freely by his grace”.

“And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.”
Romans 4:4, 5

The Ground of Justification – “Solus Christus” – Christ Alone

Justification is grounded only upon the all-sufficient, death and resurrection of Christ.

Christ alone! Christ period! Christ plus nothing within us!

Christ’s atoning work accounted to believers is objective, it comes from outside of us and is applied to us. In the Reformation it was described as being alien to us, an “alien righteousness”. In Christ’s death, He suffered in our place. He bore the punishment due our sins. He made full satisfaction for His people. The following passages demonstrate justification by Christ alone:

“let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:10-12

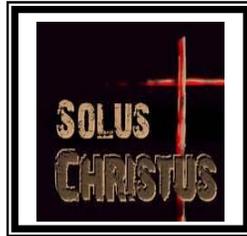
“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood.” Romans 3:23-25

“but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.” Romans 5:8, 9

“Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.” Romans 8:33, 34

“yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so 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.” Galatians 2:16

Jesus’ resurrection is proof that His sacrifice was effective and accepted by the Father as full payment for our sin debt. Romans 4:22-25 reads: “That is why his faith was ‘counted to him as righteousness.’ But the words ‘it



was counted to him’ were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”

“his Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.” Acts 2:23,24

“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.” Acts 2:29-32

“And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. .” 1 Corinthians 15:17-20

If Christ did not rise from the dead, then we are still in our sins and there is no justification and salvation. It would all be in vain! But He did rise from the dead and one day we will too.

He conquered death! Death could not hold him down!

The Means of Justification - Sola Fide – Through Faith Alone

The only means through which sinners like us may receive forgiveness and be declared righteous and right with God according to the Bible is faith alone apart from any personal works whatsoever. Again, according to Ephesians 2:8, saving faith is the gift of God. Faith is God’s gift in that He grants the ability to savingly believe. Sinners must believe in response to the Gospel to be actually justified. It is only then that our sin debt is fully discharged and the perfect obedience of Christ’s life and sacrificial death is credited to us personally, having trusted in Christ by grace through faith alone apart from works. The following passages demonstrate justification by grace through faith alone:

“Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.” Acts 13:38-39

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

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.” Romans 3:21-25

“Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness” Romans 4:4-5

Therefore if it is by grace through faith alone, it is not by works of any



kind. The Apostle Paul, standing true to the Gospel, defending justifica-

tion through faith, wrote in Galatians ch. 2:12 :

“If righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.”

Although the word “alone” does not appear in the Apostle Paul’s expositions of justification in Romans and Galatians, when justification is characterized as being by grace through faith apart from works of any kind, it is tantamount to saying that justification is by grace through faith alone.

R.C. Sproul quotes both Luther and Calvin on this very issue as it was at the very center of the controversy in the Reformation:



“whether Paul does not assert more vehemently that faith alone justifies than I do, although he does not use the word *alone*, which I have used. For he who says: Works do not justify, but faith justifies, certainly affirms more strongly that faith justifies than does he who says: Faith alone justifies...”

Martin Luther, *What Luther Says*, 2:707-8, quoted by R.C. Sproul, *Faith Alone*, p. 161



“... their objection to the exclusive word *alone* is not only unfounded, but is obviously absurd. Does he not plainly enough attribute everything to faith alone when he disconnects it with works?”

Calvin, *Inst. of the Christian Rel.*, 2:55 (3.11.9), quoted by R.C. Sproul, *Faith Alone*, p. 161

John Piper weighs in on the seriousness of justification by faith apart from works:

“Therefore, the subject matter of this book—justification by faith apart from works of the law—is serious. There is as much riding on this truth as could ride on any truth in the Bible. “If righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose” (Gal. 2:21). And if Christ died for no purpose, we are still in our sins, and those who have died in Christ have perished. Paul called down a curse on those who bring a different gospel because “all who rely on works of the law are under a curse” (Gal. 3:10), and he would spare us this curse. “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law” (Gal. 5:4). And if we are severed from Christ, there is no one to bear our curse, because “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13).”

John Piper, *The Future of Justification*, p. 14, 15

This is not dishonoring the Law of God, because the purpose of the Law was not to grant life, but to identify and expose sin in humans. The Apostle Paul argued that if there were any law system that could give life, it would have been by the Law, but ultimately the Law was not intended to justify:

“yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so 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. ” Galatians 2:16

“...For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.” Gal. 3:21,22

Paul and James - The Faith that Justifies and its Character

Since very early in the church, Paul’s words and James words on justification seem to have been pitted against one another. James wrote his letter before Paul wrote either Galatians or Romans. According to N.T. scholar Daniel Wallace, James wrote the letter of James in approx. 44-45 AD, and Paul wrote Galatians approx. 54-55 AD and Romans approx. 57-58 AD.

James writes that a person is “justified by works” and not by faith alone using Abraham as an example:

“Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”
James 2:21-24

The Apostle Paul, writing to the Galatians first says:

“We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so 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.”
Galatians 2:15, 16 (See whole context: verse 11-21)

Paul then writes later to the Romans:

“For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. . . For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”
Romans 3:20, 28

Then he argues even Abraham was not justified before God by works:

“For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.”
Romans 4:42

On the surface this looks like serious contradiction between the two writers. Yet a clearer picture emerges as we look more closely. Sproul writes:

“On the surface, it appears that we have a clear contradiction between Paul and James. The problem is exacerbated when we realize that both use the same Greek word for justification and both use Abraham to prove their arguments. This problem can be resolved when we see that the verb ‘to justify’ and its noun form, ‘justification,’ have shades of meaning in Greek. One of the meanings of the verb is ‘to vindicate’ or ‘to demonstrate.’ Jesus once said, ‘Wisdom is justified by all her children’ (Luke 7:35). He did not mean that wisdom has its sins remitted or is counted righteous by God by having children, but that a wise decision may be vindicated by its consequences. James and Paul were addressing different questions. James was answering the question: ‘What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?’ (2:14). He understood that anyone can profess to have faith, but true faith is demonstrated as authentic by its consequent works. The claim of faith is vindicated (justified) by works. Paul has Abraham justified in the theological sense in Genesis 15 before he does any works. James points to the vindication or demonstration of Abraham’s faith in obedience in Genesis 22.”

R.C. Sproul, Resurrection and Justification

And so we see that Paul writes that Abraham was justified through believing God before any works, and James emphasizes that Abraham’s faith was vindicated when put to the test. Martin Luther is famous for saying: “Justification is by faith alone, but not by faith that is alone.” What Luther Says, 2:704

Concerning a practical description of faith, Martin Luther wrote these words:

“Faith cannot help doing good works constantly. It doesn't stop to ask if good works ought to be done, but before anyone asks, it already has done them and continues to do them without ceasing. . . Faith is a living, bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it. Such confidence and knowledge of God's grace makes you happy, joyful and bold in your relationship to God and all creatures. The Holy Spirit makes this happen through faith. . .” Luther, Intro. to St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, German Bible of 1522

So just like the topic of the atonement, some Scriptures seem to contradict others on the surface, but when one digs deeper and looks at the context and compares Scripture with Scripture, the seeming contradictions are reconciled.

Behaving contrary to the Gospel - Galatians - Paul and Peter

Galatians was penned by the Apostle Paul for the purpose of contending for the very Gospel and more precisely it was a defense of justification by grace through faith in Christ apart from the works of the Law. The heresy of the Judaizers was the first major challenge to the Apostolic teaching of Justification. The Apostle Paul wrote,

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I

say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.” Galatians 1:6-9

It is not only important to believe the truth of the doctrine of justification, but it is equally important to live in accordance with it. To behave in a way contrary to justification by grace through faith alone in Christ alone is to behave in a way that is contrary to the Gospel. Even such a figure as the Apostle Peter was intimidated at one point to behave in a manner contrary to justification through faith alone. The Apostle Paul stood him down before everyone in the Galatian church because, fearing the circumcision party who came from James, he drew away from the gentile believers. Paul denounced his behavior as hypocritical and not in step with the Gospel:

“But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?” We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so 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.” Galatians 2:11-16

Therefore realizing that justification by grace through faith alone in Christ alone is a legal, forensic declaration of God, the character of that faith is demonstrated, even vindicated in what we do and how we interact with people. The above is one example of what justification by grace through faith alone should not look like. Paul is arguing for a faith that is not alone, one with character, with substance. Not a mere profession. With our Lord’s help we must live in accordance with the reality of justification through faith alone and the ramifications of the Gospel.

What Justification is not!

Justification is not Sanctification –

It is a very serious error to confuse justification with sanctification. As we have seen from the Scriptural words used for justification, it has to do with a believer’s legal standing before God not

their actual personal holiness. As we noted in a previous article, sanctification pertains to one’s personal holiness and Christlikeness. Sanctification comes from the Greek word, *hagios*, which basically means to be set apart for God, or to be holy. Justification is a one-time declaration by God in the believer’s life.

<p>We must not confuse justification and sanctification.</p> <p>Justification is a once and for all declaration by God that one is righteous.</p> <p>Sanctification is a life-long process of growth in holiness and Christlikeness.</p>
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A believer can never be more justified before God than when he first believed. How can anyone be seen as more righteous than Christ, right? Sanctification, on the other hand is progressive, that is, the believer grows in personal holiness and practical godliness as he follows Christ as Lord.

Louis Berkhof commented concerning the difference between justification and sanctification:

“The following points of difference between justification and sanctification should be carefully noted:

1. Justification removes the guilt of sin and restores the sinner to all the filial rights involved in his state as a child of God, including an eternal inheritance. Sanctification removes the pollution of sin and renews the sinner ever increasingly in conformity to the image of God.
2. Justification takes place outside of the sinner in the tribunal of God, and does not change his inner life, though the sentence is brought home to him subjectively. Sanctification, on the other hand, takes place in the inner life of man and gradually affects his whole being.
3. Justification takes place once for all. It is not repeated, neither is it a process; it is complete at once and for all time. There is no more or less in justification; man is either fully justified, or he is not justified at all. In distinction from it sanctification is a continuous process, which is never completed in this life.”

Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 513, 514

Justification and sanctification are both essential facets of the whole order of salvation. Whoever is truly justified will be sanctified, the one follows the other. But to confuse and mix the two will cause serious harm to the truth of the Gospel and to the spiritual life of the individual and the church.

The Protestant Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodoxy

By the sixteenth century, the state of the church had deteriorated from bad to worse. Clerical abuses, terrible ignorance on the part of the laity had the church in spiritual darkness for several centuries. The Eastern and Western Churches were by then fully developed priestly and sacramental systems. For most people, Scripture and the true Gospel were obscured by these sacraments, tradition, mysticism, superstition and the weight of the church hierarchies both in the West and the East. In Roman Catholicism, justification is by an infusion of the grace of righteousness at baptism. Concerning justification the Catholic Encyclopedia says:

“The effects of justification - The two elements of active justification, forgiveness of sin and sanctification, furnish at the same time the elements of habitual justification, freedom from sin and holiness. According to the Catholic doctrine, however, this freedom from sin and this sanctity are effected, not by two distinct and successive Divine acts, but by a single act of God. For, just as light dispels darkness, so the infusion of sanctifying grace *eo ipso* dispels from the soul original and mortal sin. (Cf. Trent, sess. VI, can. xi.)” Catholic Encyclopedia (online version), Article on Justification

About this concept of infusion of grace and righteousness, R.C. Sproul comments:

“But Rome believes in infusion, which is the view that the righteousness of Christ is actually put into the believer, so that the person is actually righteous. The righteousness of Christ is not simply credited to the person’s account; it actually becomes the person’s possession. . . So, if someone assents to the infused grace of baptism and cooperates with it, he or she is then in a state of grace or justification.” R.C. Sproul, *Are We Together?*, p 31, 32

Catholicism, heavily influenced by Latin thought, has developed this theory of justification by infusion under the influence of the Latin word and Roman concept for justice, *justificare*, instead of the Biblical Hebrew and Greek words noted above. This has led to a mixture of justification and sanctification that as we noted above, seriously undermines the Gospel of grace. If this state of grace or infused justification were to be lost, the Roman Catholic Church has a remedy for it. Sproul continues,

“In this case, it is the sacrament of penance, which the Roman Catholic Church in the sixteenth century defined as “a second plank” of justification for those who have made shipwreck of their souls, that is, those who have committed mortal sins and lost the grace of justification.”
R.C. Sproul, *Are We Together?*, p. 33

The Protestant Reformation came on to the scene in about 1517 and justification by grace through faith alone in Christ alone was at the center of the cause. See Appendix 1 below for a summary of the Reformation. The Roman Catholic Church responded to the Protestant Reformation teaching on justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone with curses and anathemas. These anathemas tragically boil down to an anathema against the Gospel itself.

“The RCC responded to the Protestant criticisms at the Council of Trent, where it gave official, formal decrees with respect to its doctrine. Justification was discussed in the Sixth Session, and the church laid out a number of decrees regarding its view, as well as thirty-three specific condemnations, or “anathemas,” of different views, which Rome regarded as repudiations of error and heresy. Each of these condemnations was couched in a consistent formula: “if anyone saith . . . let him be anathema,” which means, “let him be damned.” The vast majority of these condemnations were directed at the Reformers... If the Reformation articulation of the biblical doctrine of justification was correct ..., to anathematize it was to anathematize the gospel. If any communion claims to be Christian but denies or condemns an essential truth of Christianity, at that point that organization shows itself to be apostate and no longer a true or valid church.”

R.C. Sproul, *Are We Together?*, p. 35

What an indictment! An historic church communion responding to Biblical reformation by retaliating with authoritarian condemnations, which in turn implicates it in actually condemning the historic Gospel of Jesus Christ. That is tantamount to apostasy. See App. 2 for decrees of Trent.

The Protestant Reformation occurred in Western Europe, so the Eastern Orthodox Churches, virtually sat out the controversy. The Eastern Church seemed to emphasize what is known as “theosis” or “deification” over “justification”, as it was never as much an issue in the east. Their doctrine of “theosis” emphasizes taking on the divine nature through spiritual disciplines and mysteries of that church, such as their sacraments, contemplation, and the veneration of images of the saints and their relics. That being said, the Eastern doctrine of justification is very similar to that

of Catholicism and opposed to the Protestant doctrine, what we would consider to be the historical, Biblical doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone in the finished work of Christ alone. In Catholicism, as we have seen, justification is an “infusion” of righteousness received in the sacrament of baptism. In the Eastern Church it is referred as an “impartation” of righteousness and is related to entrance into their church by baptism. The following from an Orthodox website

“In the Eastern Church, this justification (impartation of righteousness) is associated with entrance into the Church. This is an ancient practice preserved from the earliest times. The liturgical texts indicate a process of conversion that culminates in baptism and the joining of oneself to the Church. The baptismal service text clearly defines this belief when the convert or newly baptized infant [after the baptism] is told, “You are justified; you are illumined!” [Justification, Orthodoxwiki](#)

Concerning this concept of *theosis*, Protestant writer Samuel Storms has written:

“Orthodoxy does not emphasize the forensic or legal concepts of the western church such as justification by faith alone. Rather, it stresses the concept of *theosis* or the gradual divinization of man. The Orthodox appeal to 2 Peter 1:4 (“so that you may become partakers of the divine nature”) to support the idea that fundamental to salvation and acceptance with God is becoming like Christ through a process of ever-deepening mystical union with him. ... This process is a cooperative work of divine grace and human effort. Orthodox theologians insist they do not believe in pantheism: the human nature does not cease to exist, nor do humans become God in such a way that no distinction between Creator and creature is left. Humans “are called to become by grace what God is by nature”.

[Samuel Storms, Article on Eastern Orthodoxy](#)

Just by way of contrast, concerning the meaning of 2 Peter 1:4, the N.T. Greek scholar A.T. Robertson commented that the passage refers to the new birth or regeneration.

A.T. Robertson, Word Studies in the N.T., 2 Peter 1:4

Imputed Righteousness!

Not Infused Righteousness or Imparted Righteousness



The New Perspective on Paul

Here we are in the 21st Century and the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone is under siege again. A modern multifaceted movement known as the “New Perspective on Paul” has come on to the scene to challenge the classic Protestant, and we would believe, the historic Biblical view on the essential doctrine of justification. Due to space, see more detailed discussion in Appendix 3 at the end of the article. The key personalities and groups in this movement are: Krister Stendahl, Lutheran, E.P. Sanders, Methodist, James Dunn, Church of Scotland, and N.T. Wright, Church of England, and the Federal Vision, Auburn Ave. movements. In short, this loosely knit movement in New Testament “scholarship” that as the article in Theopedia says, “seeks to reinterpret the Apostle Paul and his letters, argues that Paul has been misinterpreted by Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformers and continues to be misunderstood by the Reformation ‘Old Perspective’ understanding.” The article goes on to say:

“Sanders argues that the Judaism of Paul's day has been wrongly criticized as a religion of “works-salvation” by those in the Protestant tradition. ... adherents call for a rethinking of Paul and a greater understanding of him in light of what the NPP claims are the *true beliefs* of first century Judaism.

[Theopedia, New Perspective on Paul](#)

More recently, it seems that New Testament scholar N.T. Wright has taken the lead as the view's most noted proponent. This movement thus far seems to be most prominent in “scholarly” or “academic” circles and some seminaries, but seems to be gaining a wider acceptance. Let us not underestimate the seriousness of this challenge. After all we are talking about the doctrine upon which a church and church denominations and associations is said to “stand or fall”!

The main assertions of this movement are: (See Appendix 2 for more details)

1. **Judaism in the first century, Paul's era, was not a religion characterized by “works-salvation”, but a religion of grace.**

2. The pattern of religion for first century Jews was covenant law keeping. This has been termed “covenantal nomism” in the movement.
3. In regard to Justification, according to Wright, justification is not merely an initial means by which someone is right with God, but rather a mark of who already is. Justification in NPP has more to do about Jewish-Gentile issues rather than one's status before God.
4. A denial of imputed righteousness. Adapted from Theopedia, Article, The New Perspective

John Piper has commented about N.T. Wright's statements about Justification:

“Wright's view is a shift in emphasis. He believes in the death of Christ; he believes in the substitutionary atonement; he believes in penal substitution. But he is always backgrounding these things so that the universal lordship of Christ is foregrounded. It's the negations he makes that are so troubling, not his affirmations. . . ‘Justification is not how someone becomes a Christian. It is the declaration that they have become a Christian.’ ‘Justification’ in the first century was not about how someone might establish a relationship with God. It was about God's eschatological definition, both future and present, of who was, in fact, a member of his people.’ ‘Justification was not so much about ‘getting in’, or indeed about ‘staying in’, as about ‘how you could tell who was in.’ . . .

I think that is very wrong and very hurtful to the doctrine of justification, because he's disconnecting it from the event by which we are saved, or by which we enter into favor with God.”

John Piper, Interview About The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T. Wright

Concerning Wright's statements on the imputation of God's righteousness, Piper comments:

“I'm concerned most especially about what he teaches about the role of the imputation of God's righteousness in Christ to us and the imputation of the obedience of Jesus to us according to Romans 5:19. Here's what Wright says about imputation. . . ‘If we use the language of the law-court, it makes no sense whatever to say that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either the plaintiff or the defendant.’ . . . To say that the imputation of God's righteousness across the courtroom onto the defendant in union with Jesus Christ is nonsense is devastating.”

John Piper, Interview About The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T. Wright

The danger of this challenge is the subversion of the Biblical doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone in the atonement and resurrection of Christ alone, indeed Sola Fide, and thereby the subversion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ itself! We must be careful to heed the Paul's words in Galatians 1:6-10. One might suspect that the goals of this movement could be summarized as a desire among them to undermine and thereby remove the main obstacle that remains between Protestants and the Roman Catholic Church, namely the Reformation doctrine of justification by “Sola Fide”, that is faith alone. The main personalities in the movement are in “mainline” churches and tend to one degree or another towards theological liberalism. Sanders, Dunn and Wright do not hold to Biblical Inerrancy. In fact N.T. Wright is quoted as calling the doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy, that “stupid American doctrine”. **The New Perspective on Paul (iTunes Link) (MP3s), by D. A. Carson**

In conclusion, John Piper has written:

“More importantly, eternal life hangs in the balance . . . ‘Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed’ (Gal. 1:8). Getting the good news about Jesus right is a matter of life and death. It is the message “by which you are being saved” (1 Cor. 15:2).”
John Piper, The Future of Justification, p. 14

Re-emphasizing the Importance of this Doctrine.

As we said above, when we look at this essential doctrine, we cannot possibly underestimate its extreme importance. With this doctrine the Gospel and the Church truly stands or falls. Justification by grace through faith alone in Christ alone is the very heart of the Gospel

**Justification by grace
through faith in Christ
alone is the heart of the
Gospel !**

of Jesus Christ. That being said, it seems that at various times throughout church history this essential truth has been challenged and attacked.

Just as the story of rebellious humanity is one of constructing its prideful towers of Babel, so also it invests itself in building projects self-justification. R.C. Sproul wrote,

“In our day it is evident that though many still affirm Sola Fide in its essential matter, they do not consider its importance to be so great. It may be an important plank in the building, but not in the foundation. . . Sola Fide is important not merely because the church stands or falls on it. It is important because on it we stand or fall. The place where and the time when we will either stand or fall is at the judgment seat of God.”
R.C. Sproul, Faith Alone, p. 70

Wayne Grudem argues:

“A right understanding of justification is absolutely crucial to the whole Christian faith. Once Martin Luther realized the truth of justification by faith alone, he became a Christian and overflowed with the new - found joy of the gospel. The primary issue in the Protestant Reformation was a dispute with the Roman Catholic Church over justification. If we are to safeguard the truth of the gospel for future generations, we must understand the truth of justification even today, a true view of justification is the dividing line between the biblical gospel of salvation by faith alone and all false gospels of salvation based on good works.” Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 722

The Practical Implications of Biblical Justification

What some have very dangerously characterized as “legal fiction” is actually a very great blessing for various reasons. Grudem writes of two of the main implications of justification by faith alone that should serve to encourage the unbeliever who God has under a sense of conviction and serve as a great joy to the disciple of Christ currently persevering through his life in repentance and faith:

“The practical implications of the doctrine of justification by faith alone are very significant. First, this doctrine enables us to offer genuine hope to unbelievers who know they could never make themselves righteous before God: if salvation is a free gift to be received through faith alone, then anyone who hears the gospel may hope that eternal life is freely offered and may be obtained. Second, this doctrine gives us confidence that God will never make us pay the penalty for sins that have been forgiven on Christ’s merits. ... God can never nor will ever take vengeance on us for past sins or make us pay the penalty that is due for them or punish us out of wrath and for the purpose of doing us harm. ‘There is therefore now no condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus’ (Rom 8:1). This fact should give us a great sense of joy and confidence before God that we are accepted by him and that we stand before him as ‘not guilty’ and ‘righteous’ forever.” Wayne Grudem, *Sys. Theol.*, p. 732

As we bring our examination of the great doctrine to a close, let us consider a few last things. God is glorified in the justification of sinners by His free grace. Justification by free grace through faith leads to a zeal in obedience to Christ from a sincere gratitude in His followers. Justification logically precedes, but truly leads to sanctification. That is, those who are justified, will be sanctified. According to D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, the preaching of justification has historically been central to various revivals of faith in redemptive history. As we preach, and live in accordance with the Biblical doctrine of justification, and thereby, the Gospel, we glorify and exalt the name of God and the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. May we have the attitude of the Apostle Paul regarding having a righteousness through faith in Christ as he wrote the Philippian church:

“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.” Phil. 3:8, 9

Rock of Ages

**Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee;
let the water and the blood**

**from thy wounded side which flowed, be of sin the double cure;
save from wrath and make me pure.**

**Not the labors of my hands can fulfill thy law's commands; could my zeal no respite know,
could my tears forever flow, all for sin could not atone;
thou must save, and thou alone.**

**Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling; naked, come to thee for dress;
helpless, look to thee for grace; foul, I to the fountain fly;
wash me, Savior, or I die.**

**While I draw this fleeting breath, when mine eyes shall close in death,
when I soar to worlds unknown, see thee on thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee. *Augustus Toplady***

Bibliography & Resources

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Audio Visual Resources

[Donald Carson - The New Perspective on Paul](#)
John Piper – [Justification Sermons Page](#) Multiple Audios
James White - [Justification Sermons Page](#) Multiple Audios
James White - Video – [Defending Sola Fide](#)
R.C Sproul – Ligonier Ministries - [Justification by Faith Alone – Series](#)
[R.C Sproul - Imputed vs Infused Righteousness – Part 1](#)
[R.C Sproul - Imputed vs Infused Righteousness – Part 2](#)
R.W. Glenn - [Justification](#)

Appendix 1

The Rise of the Protestant Reformation

The Protestant Reformation came on to the scene in about 1517 through the actions of an Augustinian priest and theologian, Martin Luther in reaction to the church sanctioned selling of religious indulgences and other teachings and practices. One thing led to another and Luther, recently converted to Christ, having studied intently the Letter to the Romans, was awakened to justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. He nailed 95 challenges called *theses* to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany. The Reformation had begun. Multitudes began embracing this reforming movement. The Catholic Church put Luther on trial for heresy. He would not turn away from what he had written and the Catholic Church would have executed him if he had not been rescued by the prince of the region he was from. Other reformers such as Zwingli, Bucer, Farrell, Calvin, Knox, and Turretin helped to expand and solidify this Biblical reformation in much of Europe. Coming out of this reformation emerged five major emphases of doctrine known as the “Solas”. Sola Scriptura – Scripture Alone, Sola Gratia – Grace Alone, Sola Fide – Faith Alone, Solus Christus – Christ Alone, and Soli Deo Gloria – Glory to God Alone. But at the center of this tremendous reformation movement and revival was Sola Fide – Justification by faith alone. For more information, see the article on the Reformation on [Theopedia](#).

Appendix 2

The anathemas of the Roman Catholic Council of Trent against the Protestant Reformers

CANON IX.- "If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema."

CANON XII.-If any one saith, that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake; or, that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified; let him be anathema.

CANON XVIII.-If any one saith, that the commandments of God are, even for one that is justified and constituted in grace, impossible to keep; let him be anathema.

CANON XXIV.-If any one saith, that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works; but that the said works are merely the fruits and signs of Justification obtained, but not a cause of the increase thereof; let him be anathema.

CANON XXX.-If any one saith, that, after the grace of Justification has been received, to every penitent sinner the guilt is remitted, and the debt of eternal punishment is blotted out in such wise, that there remains not any debt of temporal punishment to be discharged either in this world, or in the next in Purgatory, before the entrance to the kingdom of heaven can be opened (to him); let him be anathema.

CANON XXXIII.-If any one saith, that, by the Catholic doctrine touching Justification, by this holy Synod inset forth in this present decree, the glory of God, or the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ are in any way derogated from, and not rather that the truth of our faith, and the glory in fine of God and of Jesus Christ are rendered (more) illustrious; let him be anathema.

Council of Trent, Justification <http://thecounciloftrent.com/ch6.htm>

Appendix 3

The New Perspective on Paul

The main assertions of this movement are:

1. Judaism in the first century, Paul's era, was not a religion characterized by "works-salvation", but a religion of grace. Sanders wrote:

"On the point at which many have found the decisive contrast between Paul and Judaism - grace and works - Paul is in agreement with Palestinian Judaism... Salvation is by grace but judgment is according to works'...God saves by grace, but... within the framework established by grace he rewards good deeds and punishes transgression." (Paul and Palestinian Judaism, p. 543)

N.T. Wright wrote:

"we have misjudged early Judaism, especially Pharisaism, if we have thought of it as an early version of Pelagianism," (Wright, What Saint Paul Really Said, p. 32).

2. The pattern of religion for first century Jews was covenant law keeping. This has been termed "covenantal nomism" in the movement. Essentially, it is asserted that the Jews were occupied with keeping the covenant, rather than following their laws out of legalism per se. According to Sanders, "one's place in the God's Plan is established on the basis of the covenant." As long as a Jew kept covenant with God, he remained part of the God's people. The covenant was kept by obedience to its commandments. As a result in this view, Judaism was not concerned with how to have a right relationship with God, but with how to remain his covenant people.

3. In regard to Justification, according to Wright, justification is not merely an initial means by which someone is right with God, but rather a mark of who already is. He writes,

"The doctrine of justification by faith is not what Paul means by 'the gospel'. It is implied by the gospel; when the gospel is proclaimed, people come to faith and so are regarded by God as members of his people. But 'the gospel' is not an account of how people get saved. It is, as we saw in an earlier chapter, the proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ....Let us be quite clear. 'The gospel' is the announcement of Jesus' lordship, which works with power to bring people into the family of Abraham, now redefined around Jesus Christ and characterized solely by faith in him. 'Justification' is the doctrine which insists that all those who have this faith belong as full members of this family, on this basis and no other." "In theology, therefore, justification is not the means whereby it becomes

possible to declare someone in the right. It is simply that declaration itself. It is not how someone becomes a Christian, but simply the declaration that someone is a Christian. It is not the exercise of mercy, but the just declaration concerning one who has already received mercy. This is a crucial distinction, without which it is impossible to understand the biblical material."

Justification in NPP has more to do about Jewish-Gentile issues rather than one's status before God.

4. A denial of imputed righteousness. Wright for example reinterprets passages historically used to teach imputed righteousness. 2 Corinthians 5:21, is an example. It refers to God's covenant faithfulness instead of the imputation of righteousness to the believer. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Wright does not believe God's righteousness is anything that He can *give* or that can be transferred to a believer. The believer is simply declared righteous because he is now a covenant member.

Adapted from Theopedia, Article, The New Perspective.

John Piper has commented about N.T. Wright's statements about Justification:

"Wright's view is a shift in emphasis. He believes in the death of Christ; he believes in the substitutionary atonement; he believes in penal substitution. But he is always backgrounding these things so that the universal lordship of Christ is foregrounded. It's the negations he makes that are so troubling, not his affirmations. Here's a few more illustrations of the sentences that, when I read them, I thought, he can't mean this:

'Justification is not how someone becomes a Christian. It is the declaration that they have become a Christian.' 'Justification' in the first century was not about how someone might establish a relationship with God. It was about God's eschatological definition, both future and present, of who was, in fact, a member of his people.' 'Justification was not so much about 'getting in', or indeed about 'staying in', as about 'how you could tell who was in.'"

I think that is very wrong and very hurtful to the doctrine of justification, because he's disconnecting it from the event by which we are saved, or by which we enter into favor with God. To me, that's the main issue—at what point is God totally for me? Wrath was upon me before my conversion; wrath was upon me before I was in Christ by faith; after faith and union with Christ, wrath is no longer on me."

'So for N. T. Wright to say that justification does not come to Paul's lips or pen when we ask him about how to find a living, saving relationship with God, I just say, No way. It's not only misleading, it's not true to the text and it's going to hurt the church."

Concerning Wright's statements on the imputation of God's righteousness, Piper comments:

"I'm concerned most especially about what he teaches about the role of the imputation of God's righteousness in Christ to us and the imputation of the obedience of Jesus to us according to Romans 5:19. Here's what Wright says about imputation. . . If we use the language of the law-court, it makes no sense whatever to say that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either the plaintiff or the defendant. Righteousness is not an object, a substance or a gas which can be passed across the courtroom. . . . If and when God does act to vindicate his people, his people will then, metaphorically speaking, have the status of 'righteousness' But the righteousness they have will not be God's own righteousness. That makes no sense at all. (*What Saint Paul Really Said*, 98-99) I almost titled this book *Nonsense Happens*, because he says, 'That makes no sense at all.' But I knew that title would be misunderstood. People would think I was saying that I think everything N. T. Wright has written is nonsense, which I don't believe in the least—he writes many amazing, helpful, glorious things. But this struck me as being very hurtful. To say that the imputation of God's righteousness across the courtroom onto the defendant in union with Jesus Christ is nonsense is devastating."

John Piper, Interview About The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T. Wright

The danger of this challenge is the subversion of the Biblical doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone in the atonement and resurrection of Christ alone, also known as *Sola Fide*, and thereby the subversion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ itself! Here we must heed the warnings of the Apostle Paul in his letter the Galatians:

"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse! Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ." Galatians 1:6-10

The goals of this movement may be summed up as a desire among many of those in the movement to undermine and thereby remove the main obstacle that remains between Protestants and the Roman Catholic Church, namely the Reformation doctrine of justification by “Sola Fide”, that is faith alone. The main personalities in the movement tend to one degree or another towards theological liberalism. Sanders, Dunn and Wright do not hold the Biblical inerrancy. In fact N.T. Wright is quoted as calling the doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy as that “stupid American doctrine”.

[The New Perspective on Paul \(iTunes Link\) \(MP3s\)](#), by [D. A. Carson](#)

In conclusion, John Piper has written:

“More importantly, eternal life hangs in the balance: ‘We are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?’ (2 Cor. 2:15–16). How we live and what we teach will make a difference in whether people obey the gospel or meet Jesus in the fire of judgment, ‘when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus’ (2 Thess. 1:7–8). This is why Paul was so provoked at the false teaching in Galatia. It was another gospel and would bring eternal ruin to those who embraced it. This accounts for his unparalleled words: ‘Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed’ (Gal. 1:8). Getting the good news about Jesus right is a matter of life and death. It is the message “by which you are being saved” (1 Cor. 15:2).”

John Piper, *The Future of Justification*, p. 14