

Fundamentals of Our Faith from the Beginning

Understanding Salvation (Part Two): Justification

Definition: Justification is our declared righteousness before God, made possible by Christ's death and resurrection for us. Occurs at the time of regeneration, through the instrument of faith, as a product of our adoption and union with Christ, whereby His life, death, and resurrection benefit us on account of our union with Him.

Main Idea: Justification is not a relic of a particular era, that is the Reformation, nor is it equative to salvation, that is justification does not equal salvation, but it is a crucial element of the application of salvation. Human beings are unable to live in accord with the character of God and thus need an alien righteousness to be declared righteous before Him. This alien righteousness comes to us from God as part of our union with Christ and we are united to Christ through the instrument of faith, which is a gift. Justification is by faith alone, but faith is never alone – good works always follow.

1. The role of human sin and the need for justification (Romans 3:9-20):

- a. All mankind is under sin (3:9).
- b. All mankind is accountable to God (3:19).
- c. No one will be justified before God based upon their works (3:20).
- d. A picture of justification (Luke 18:9-14).

2. The role of faith and its nature since righteousness is by faith alone (Romans 3:21-28, 4:1-8):

- a. The prominence of faith in Scripture (Luke 18:13-14; John 6:52-59; Acts 13:38-39; Rom 3:21-28).
- b. Faith is a gift (Eph 2:8-10).
- c. Faith is an instrument (Rom 3:22, 25, 28; 4:11 and also the larger context; Eph 2:8-10).
- d. Christ – the object of our faith (Rom 3:22,24, 26; Rom 4:24 and also larger context).

3. The meaning of righteousness and the imputation of righteousness (Romans 3:21-26, 5:12-19):

- a. Righteousness is eschatological (Phil 3:9).
- b. Righteousness is forensic (Ex 23:7; Job; Prov 17:15; Rom 5:18-19).
- c. The righteousness of God (Rom 1:17, 3:21-26).
- d. The imputation of righteousness (Romans 4:1-8, Romans 5:12-19; 2 Cor 5:21).

4. Good works and justification by faith alone (James 2:14-26; Eph 2:8-10):

- a. Defining the faith that James is writing about (James 2:14-26)
- b. The different contexts to which Paul and James are writing.
- c. Faith expressing itself in works (James 2:14-26).

Material for the four points on this handout is adapted from Thomas Schreiner, *Faith Alone – The Doctrine of Justification: What the Reformers Taught and Why it Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 2015).

d. God has ordained good works for us (Eph 2:8-10).

Application questions:

How does justification by faith make sense of Christian experience? For instance, how does it make sense of our own struggles and the struggles of our brothers and sisters?

How does justification by faith bring assurance?

How does justification by faith cut against the grain of what we encounter in the work-place?

How might justification by faith encourage/challenge us as we battle pride/the fear of man?

How does justification by faith encourage us to live lives worthy of the gospel?