

APPLYING TRUTH TO LIFE

*Grace Gatherings*

THEOLOGY NIGHTS | MARCH 20, 2024

GRACE CHURCH  
WILLIAMSBURG

# Question 15

**Provide an explanation and biblical defense of justification.**

Justification is at the heart of Christian belief.

- “How can **sinners** come to be in a **right relationship** with the holy God of the universe?”
- “If sinners are to have any good news at all, the **consequences** created by their breaking [God’s] law and being **alienated** from God must be **overcome**. But how can that be?” (*MacArthur/Mayhue, Biblical Doctrine*)
- Since each person shares in the sin nature of Adam, and since each person bears the full **guilt** of that sin, how can a just God justify the **ungodly**?

# Question 15

## What is justification?

- In justification, “God constitutes the ungodly righteous, and consequently can declare them to be righteous. In the justification for sinners there is a **constitutive** act [making a thing what it is] as well as a **declarative** [to make known].” (*John Murray*; Rom. 5:19)

# Question 15

## What is justification?

- “Justification is a **judicial** act of God pardoning sinners (wicked and ungodly persons, Rom. 4:5; 3:9-24), accepting them as just, and so putting permanently right their previously estranged relationship with Himself. This **justifying sentence** is God’s gift of righteousness (Rom. 5:15-17), His bestowal of a **status of acceptance** for Jesus’ sake (2 Cor. 5:21).” *(J.I. Packer)*

# Question 15

## What is justification?

- Justification is “...that **instantaneous** act of God whereby, as a gift of His grace, He **imputes** to a believing sinner the full and perfect **righteousness of Christ through faith alone** and **legally declares** him perfectly righteous in His sight, **forgiving** the sinner of all unrighteousness and thus **delivering** him from all condemnation.... In the case of justification, it is **not** that the accused is innocent but that **another has paid in full** the penalty for his crimes.” (*MacArthur/Mayhue, Biblical Doctrine*)

# Question 15

## What is justification?

Justification is a legal declaration of a constituted spiritual reality; it is **not** a **transformative** spiritual **process**. Justification does not **make** us righteous.

- “Justification is based on the work of Jesus Christ and is the response of God to repentant faith, where He makes a legal declaration that His elect are forgiven of sin and possess His own righteousness....When God justifies a sinner, He pronounces that the sinner is forgiven of their sins and that they possess positive righteousness in God’s sight.” *(Heath Lambert)*
- Romans 4:4-8
- “Justification is God’s gracious provision to reverse the moral guilt we possess after the fall.” *(Heath Lambert)*

# Question 15

## What makes justification necessary?

- Our moral guilt, the fact that we are God's enemies, lawbreakers, and moral criminals in God's sight leaves us without hope of being restored into a right relationship with God. (Rom. 5:10)
- We are sinners **by heart or by nature**, and all sin is **lawlessness**. We are, in our nature, lawless, so that God sees us as **criminals**. We commit crimes because we are criminals at heart. (1 John 3:4; Rom. 3:10-18)
- As wicked sinners, we are spiritually **separated** from God by our sin nature, and God has said that He will never justify (put in right standing) the wicked. (Ex. 23:7; Prov. 17:15)

# Question 15

## What makes justification necessary?

- Because God, who is holy, **must** punish sin, sinners are in the **helpless** position of being forever separated from God by the nature of their rebellious hearts and sinful deeds. (Rom. 6:23)
- Where, then, is the **hope** of our salvation from this eternal damnation as criminals and enemies of Christ? How could God ever declare a person righteous when the reality is that they **are** guilty? (Phil. 3:18)



# Question 15

## What is the source and basis of justification?

- Sinners are “justified as a **gift** by His grace through the **redemption** which is in Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 3:24)
- Our legal right-standing with God is a gift of God’s grace; it is an act of His favor and love. Our justification is grounded in Jesus dying in the place of underserving sinners. (Rom. 5:8; 3:25)
- In Romans 3:25 God, the great Judge (Ps. 75:7), put forward Christ as perfectly satisfying His holy anger against sin through the shedding of His blood on behalf of sinners.
- **Our sins do not go unpunished**; Jesus became sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). Our crimes were laid on Him and **He was punished** to death for them (Isa. 53:6). **God did not overlook** our sins or break His own law by justifying the guilty.

# Question 15

## What is the source and basis of justification?

- The penalty demanded by the law was paid for us by Jesus dying on the cross; it was a penalty paid in full and resulted in Jesus' death!
- We are justified **based on** the shed blood of Jesus (His death) providing a propitiatory sacrifice (full satisfaction) for our sins. Jesus Himself is the **propitiation** for our sins. (1 John 4:10; 2:2)
- God is Himself **just** (morally upright/perfect) and the **Justifier** of sinners.
- This is the theological argument Paul is making in Romans as he comes to conclude in 3:26, "...so that [God] would be **just** and the **justifier** of the one who has **faith** in Jesus."

# Question 15

What is the **means** (instrument/channel) of justification for each sinner?

- **Faith!** When a sinner trusts in Jesus by faith for the forgiveness of sins, God declares the sinner righteous; it's a one-time act on God's part (Rom. 3:21-30; 5:1-2). Sinners are justified by grace **through** faith (*sola fide*).
- Justification is God's legal declaration of the spiritual reality that Jesus (our sin-bearer) paid the penalty of sin (death) **for us** which secures God's full forgiveness for our sins. Forgiveness is the **subtraction** of human sin.

# Question 15

What is the means (instrument/channel) of justification for each sinner?

- Justification is the **addition** of **divine** righteousness (Phil. 3:9). Justification is God's declaration of "not guilty" applied to the sinner. And here is why God **is both** just and the Justifier of the **ungodly**:
- God also **credits, imputes, or reckons** Jesus' righteous, sinless life to the sinner, declaring the sinner righteous in His sight. (Rom. 4:5)
- "God's declarative act of justification is based on His **constitutive** act of **imputation**." (*MacArthur/Mayhue, Biblical Doctrine*)
- In His forgiveness, God **imputes our sin** to Christ. And through His gift of faith, God **imputes Jesus' perfect life** (righteousness) to us.

# Question 15

What is the means (instrument/channel) of justification for each sinner?

- Remember, this righteousness of Christ is not worked in us in a **transformative** sense; it doesn't change our character, but is credited to us through our spiritual union with Jesus, the Righteous One, who fulfilled all righteousness on our behalf (Gal. 3:27; 1 Cor. 1:30)
- God is both just and the Justifier as He declares us righteous **with the righteousness of Jesus** which God credits (imputes) to us through faith.

# Question 15

Justification is a legal declaration made by God toward a sinner. Justification does not change our character, but it does change our spiritual **status** as we go from unrighteous lawbreakers to being credited with Jesus' righteousness in the sight of God.

It is God's way of saying that the sinner is put **right** in the eyes of the court (justified) because the legal demands of his wrongdoing (sins) have been fully met. The high court is satisfied that justice has been done.

A just punishment has been executed and exacted by God, and the penalty for sin has been paid in full **on behalf of** the guilty.

In addition, all the positive aspects of the law have been upheld and fulfilled for us in Christ, and this perfect life of sinlessness is credited to us as we believe in God's **only** provision of righteousness for us—Jesus Christ.

This is at the **heart** of what Jesus has secured for every sinner who trusts in Him as Savior and Lord.

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