

## Justification

John Murray: "Justification is still the article of the standing or falling church."<sup>1</sup>

### ➤ The Problem

- How can sinners stand righteous before a holy God?
- "The obstacles to God acquitting and restoring guilty rebels to a harmonious relationship with himself chiefly are three in number."<sup>2</sup>
  - 1 - Humanity's sinful condition (Rom 3:23)
  - 2 - The holy and righteous character of God (Gen 18:25, Hab 1:12-13).

God is perfectly holy, in that he is separated from all evil and he abhors all sin and uncleanness (Hab 1:12-13).

God is absolutely righteous, in that he embodies the perfect standard of the true, the good, and the right (Isa 45:21).

Further, he is wholly just, in that he must do right and cannot overlook sin (Gen 18:25, Deut 32:4).

- 3 - God's moral law is the inviolable standard against which all human conduct is measured (Rom. 2:12-14).

He requires obedience to himself and his laws.

Sin must be punished.

Just one sin by Adam and Eve plunged humanity into the Fall.

---

<sup>1</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 128.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 362-363.

- Therefore, how can unrighteous people become righteous before a righteous God?
- How can the immutable Lawgiver and righteous God remain righteous and just himself while also acquitting unrighteous sinners? (This is the problem posed by the apostle in Romans 3:21-26).
- This is the problem which is solved by God's work of justification.

➤ Definition

- Greek: δικαιώω – to declare or pronounce righteous; in right-standing, without guilt or stain
- Justification means to declare or pronounce to be righteous.<sup>3</sup>
- In the light of the biblical language and its use in context, we define justification as God's gracious, legal verdict in respect of those who believe in Christ, forgiving their sins and declaring them righteous through the imputation of Christ's righteousness.
- Justification is a legal action by which God declares the believer to be freed from his guilt and made right before God's law. Unlike regeneration, it does not change the soul of the believer. Justification alters the believer's legal position before God, changing it from guilty to innocent. Justification is the outcome of atonement and the imputation of Jesus' righteousness to the believer.

➤ Described

- Two problems require further description. First, how can sinful man stand righteous before God. Second, how can God remain righteous while declaring sinful man is righteous?
  - In other words, how can God be just while justifying unjust sinners?
  - This is the problem posed by the apostle in Romans 3:21-26.

---

<sup>3</sup> Murray, 128.

Romans 3:25–26 whom [Jesus Christ] God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. <sup>26</sup> It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

- In other words, it appeared that God was unrighteous by passing over, or seemingly ignoring, sins of those he forgave (who came to him in faith).
  - However, we see that he was not ignoring the sins of those he forgave. Why? Because he put forward Christ as a public propitiation.
  - Christ’s death on the cross answers the question, “Did God the Father just sweep the sins of those he forgave under the proverbial rug?” The answer is, “No. Certainly not.”
  - Instead, Christ was held accountable, as it were, for the sins of all whom God forgave.
  - Christ’s death – the death of the sinless God-man – publicly demonstrates that God remains just in justifying the unjust.
- The basis of justification is not the sinner’s nature or works, but the nature and works of Jesus Christ:

“So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. <sup>19</sup> For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous” (Rom. 5:18-19).

“He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

- Do our moral efforts or good deeds contribute to our justification?
  - No. Works are not efficacious towards justification. Faith is the means by which we are justified.

Faith is the outstretched empty hand which receives righteousness by receiving Christ (cf. Rom. 5:1).<sup>4</sup>

- We are justified by faith alone in Christ alone, not by works:

Romans 3:28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

Galatians 2:16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.

Romans 5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ

- Justification is not a progressive filling up the sinner with righteousness or gradually making the sinner more righteous. It is instantaneous declaration of righteousness before God.
- Justification is an instantaneous declaration of right-standing before God and by God. It is not a process of gradually infusing the sinner with righteousness. It is an instantaneous declaration of righteousness; the righteousness of Christ:

Luke 18:9-14 And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: <sup>10</sup> "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' <sup>13</sup> But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' <sup>14</sup> "I tell you, this man went to his house justified [δεδικαιωμένος] rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

---

<sup>4</sup>J.I. Packer, "Justification," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 596.

➤ Consequence of justification by faith alone in Christ alone

Romans 8:1 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:33–35 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; <sup>34</sup> who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. <sup>35</sup> Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

➤ God does not accept us just as we are as sinners.

- Far better, he accepts us just as Christ is; as utterly and perfectly righteous.
- By faith in Christ, we stand positionally righteous before holy God as Christ stands positionally righteous before holy God.

*"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21)*

- We are clothed in the righteousness of Christ (Gal. 3:27).

➤ Roman Catholicism on justification

- From the Council of Trent, 6th session, Canon 30: If anyone says that after the reception of the grace of justification the guilt is so remitted and the debt of eternal punishment so blotted out to every repentant sinner, that no debt of temporary punishment remains to be discharged either in this world or in purgatory before the gates of heaven can be opened, let him be anathema.
- In other words, if we believe that, by faith alone in Christ alone, all of our sin – past, present, future – is completely forgiven, with no guilt or punishment from God remaining, with the result that we stand satisfactorily righteous before God, then we are damned.
- Galatians 1:8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!
- In part, the confusion involves one of **making righteous** and **declaring righteous**.

- Regeneration and sanctification are the making righteous.
- Justification is declaring righteous.

[[. ILLUS: The difference between making righteous and declaring righteous is like the difference between a surgeon and a judge. A surgeon makes you better through surgery. A judge declares you righteous through a judicial verdict. ]]

➤ Recommended resources

- *The Cross and Salvation*, Bruce Demarest, Chapter 9, (Crossway, 1997).
- *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Biblical Truth*, eds. John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, pp. 612-623, (Crossway, 2017).
- *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, John Murray, Chapter V Justification, (Eerdmans, 2015).

## Imputation

- Imputation can be thought of as a subset of justification; of God's justifying work on behalf of the sinner.
- Definition:
  - To credit or assign
  - To place one person's sin or righteousness upon another's account
- Scripture:
  - Genesis 15:6 Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.
  - Romans 5:19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.
  - The Greek word translated "made" has the idea of "constitute" or "establish."<sup>5</sup>
  - Adam's sin was imputed or transferred to all humanity. The believer's sin was placed upon the account of Jesus when He was crucified.
  - "Just as God imputed the first sin of Adam to the human race, and just as he imputed the guilt of the race to the Lamb on the cross, so he imputes Christ's righteousness to all who believe. On the ground of Christ's virtues, God places believers in the category of righteous persons."<sup>6</sup>
  - Christ's righteousness, including all the blessings connected with it, is placed on the account of the believer. Thus, the believer's sin was given to Christ, and the Savior's perfect obedience was given to the believer.
- Described

---

<sup>5</sup> Demarest, 372.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 372.

- Justification involves a negative and positive aspect, both involving imputation.
  - Negatively, our sin is **imputed** to Jesus Christ when he suffered as our wrath-bearing sacrifice on the cross.
  - Positively, the righteousness of Christ is **imputed** to the sinner who puts faith in the Person and work of Christ.
  - Sometimes this is called “double-imputation.”
  - “Through the obedience of his life and death Christ acquired righteousness that the Father would credit to sinners who believe in him. Thus, the righteousness believers possess is not their own accomplishment. It is the right standing of another – even Jesus Christ – that is credited to their account as a free gift.”<sup>7</sup>

Philippians 3:8-9 “More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,<sup>9</sup> and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith”

- Demarest: “On behalf of sinners, Christ in his life perfectly obeyed the law and in his death bore its just penalty. Thus on the ground of Christ’s perfect satisfaction of the law, God does not impute sin; rather, he imputes righteousness to all who believe.”<sup>8</sup>
- J.I. Packer: God reckons righteousness to them not because he accounts them [repentant sinners] to have kept his law personally (which would be a false judgment), but because he accounts them to be united to the one who kept it representatively (and that is a true judgment).<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Demarest, 370-371.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 362.

<sup>9</sup> J.I. Packer, “Justification,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 596.

- John Murray, on the righteousness imputed to us: “It is the righteousness of Christ wrought by him in human nature, that righteousness of his obedience unto death, even the death of the cross.”<sup>10</sup>

➤ Recommended resources

- *The Cross and Salvation*, Bruce Demarest, Chapter 9, (Crossway, 1997).
- *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Biblical Truth*, eds. John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, pp. 614-623, (Crossway, 2017).
- *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, John Murray, Chapter V Justification, (Eerdmans, 2015).

---

<sup>10</sup> Murray, 134.