

# Chapter 11: Of Justification I

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## 1 Introduction

When investigating cause, Aristotle came up with four types of causes: material, formal, efficient, and final cause<sup>1</sup>. The formal cause of the Reformation, or the central essence of the Reformation has to do with the authority of Scripture. We can file that under the heading of *sola Scriptura*. The Doctrine of Justification is the material cause, or “the issue that was the core point of dispute<sup>2</sup>.” We can file this doctrine of Justification by grace through faith under the head of *sola fide*. So this doctrine is really, really significant in world history, and central to why we’re not Roman Catholics.

Benjamin Keach, who was involved in the production of our Confession said,

The Doctrine of Justification is one of the greatest and most weighty subjects I can insist upon; it being by all Christians acknowledged to be a Fundamental of Religion and Salvation. Hence this Article is justly stiled, by worthy Writers, *Articulus stantis, vel cadentis Religionis*: The very pillar of the Christian Religion. Other Subjects a Minister may Preach upon, and that unto the Profit and Advantage of the People; but this he must Preach, this he cannot omit, if he would truly Preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ<sup>3</sup>.

There is no significant difference between the Westminster, Savoy, and 2LBC. The Reformed Churches quite unified on this.

This isn’t just central to our dispute with Roman Catholics, but to how we, as fallen humans can be made right with God. Further, how we can know we’re right with God. And on what ground we can have any fellowship with Him at all.

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<sup>1</sup><https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-causality/#FourCaus>

<sup>2</sup><https://learn.ligonier.org/articles/what-was-the-cause-of-the-protestant-reformation>

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Renihan

Justification isn't mere pardon is it? Does God just dismiss the charges like a president might? Can God do that?

An overly brief survey of "justify" in Scripture:

Deuteronomy 25:1:

If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them; then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked.

Solomon praying over the new temple in II Chronicles 6:23:

Then hear thou from heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, by requiting the wicked, by recompensing his way upon his own head; and by justifying the righteous, by giving him according to his righteousness.

Proverbs 17:15:

He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord.

In Isaiah 53:10-11:

Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. <sup>11</sup> He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

Remember the story of the Good Samaritan in the Gospels? A lawyer's question led to it. Luke 10:29 says,

But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

Speaking to the Pharisees in Luke 16:15 Jesus says to them,

... Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

Catechism # 34: What is justification?

Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

Justification is a official, legal, binding, declaration of our status with regard to the satisfaction of God's justice—specifically that justice is satisfied, and on that basis we're pardoned. What's the opposite of justification?

Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?... (Rom 8:33-34)

Hodge says,

If to condemn does not mean to make wicked, to justify does not mean to make good. And if condemnation is a judicial, as opposed to an executive act, so is justification. In condemnation it is a judge who pronounces sentence on the guilty. In justification it is a judge who pronounces or who declares the person arraigned free from guilt and entitled to be treated as righteous.

And,

The meritorious ground of justification is not faith; we are not justified on account of our faith, considered as a virtuous or holy act or state of mind. Nor are our works of any kind the ground of justification. Nothing done by us or wrought in us satisfies the demands of justice, or can be the ground or reason of the declaration that justice as far as it concerns us is satisfied. The ground of justification is the righteousness of Christ, active and passive, i.e., including his perfect obedience to the law as a covenant, and his enduring the penalty of the law in our stead and on our behalf.

Does justification make us good?

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<sup>4</sup>Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

## 2 The defined nature of justification (1)

### *The Nature of Justification*

Those whom God effectually calleth, He also freely justifieth, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing Christ's active obedience unto the whole law, and passive obedience in His death for their whole and sole righteousness, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith, which faith they have not of themselves; it is the gift of God.

| <b>Not</b>                                            | <b>But</b>                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| by infusing righteousness                             | by pardoning                   |
| for anything wrought                                  | for Christ's sake alone        |
| by imputing faith, or any other evangelical obedience | by imputing Christ's obedience |
| <i>of themselves</i>                                  | <i>the gift of God</i>         |

We have three pairs of denials and affirmations, divided by semicolons here. These are specifically intended to address Roman Catholic, and Socinian conceptions of justification. I've never been a Roman Catholic, or a Socinian; I only know a little because of Puritan & Reformed interactions with it. Probably enough to get myself in trouble.

The first pair has to do with the essence of justification. "Not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous" In what way are we made right? We're not made right by righteousness being infused into us. The Romish conception of justification goes something like this: God infuses the believer with righteousness, then on the basis of that infused righteousness one can be declared righteous. We'd say that when "a sinner receives right standing with God, he will then experience a transformation of character and life." But what would we call that? Sanctification. That'll come up in Chapter 13. Ken will have that one, if I'm not mistaken.

See how Aquinas conflates sanctification and justification:

Just as making hot implies a movement towards heat, so justification implies a movement towards justice and includes a rectitude of order. Justification as a virtue implies a making right of man's act towards his neighbor. Justification as legal justice implies a making right of man's act in relation to the common good. But justification takes its name from the rectitude of order it implies in the interior disposition of the person who is made just<sup>5</sup>.

I don't want to leave out the Eastern Orthodox, since there seems to be a track going that way for Reformed guys these days. Back in 1629, Cyril Lucaris, a patriarch of Constantinople, published (in Geneva) a confession which largely aligned with Reformation views. At the Synod of Jerusalem in 1672 (convened in Bethlehem), it was explicitly condemned. The deliverances of these so-called cumenical councils is considered canonical—the church having authority equal to that of the Scriptures. Decree 13 from that synod says this:

We believe a man to be not simply justified through faith alone, but through faith which works through love, that is to say, through faith and works. But [the idea] that faith can fulfill the function of a hand that lays hold on the righteousness which is in Christ, and can then apply it unto us for salvation, we know to be far from all Orthodoxy. For faith so understood would be possible in all, and so none could miss salvation, which is obviously false. But on the contrary, we rather believe that it is not the correlative of faith [this is a reference to Cyril's confession; it refers to the righteousness of Christ], but the faith which is in us, justifies through works, with Christ. But we regard works not as witnesses certifying our calling, but as being fruits in themselves, through which faith becomes efficacious, and as in themselves meriting, through the Divine promises {cf. 2 Corinthians 5:10} that each of the Faithful may receive what is done through his own body, whether it be good or bad<sup>6</sup>.

In decree 9, they define faith like this: “By faith we mean the right notion that is in us concerning God and divine things.” In other words, you're justified by believing the right things about God and stuff, and doing

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<sup>5</sup><https://theophilogue.com/2014/07/03/thomas-aquinas-on-justification-summa-theologica/>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.crivoice.org/creeddositheus.html>

good works. And they explicitly deny that the righteousness of Christ has anything to do with justification. Can you think of a passage that answers that? We could quote Romans 10 about them:

<sup>1</sup> Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for [the Eastern Orthodox] is, that they might be saved. <sup>2</sup> For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. <sup>3</sup> For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. <sup>4</sup> For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

To this day they annually anathematize anyone who believes the Gospel—it's part of their liturgy. So Rome formally apostatized at the Council of Trent in the middle of the 16th century, and Constantinople in 1672. To be justified in Rome or Constantinople you must stand on your own works.

In fact, I don't know of any concept of justification, other than the Reformed, that doesn't make righteousness on the basis of something inherent in us.

What effect do these other ideas have on our assurance? Is assurance important? I John 5:13 says, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life..."

Both Rome and Constantinople were, in part, concerned that this idea of the imputation of Christ's righteousness would, at best, lead people to licentious lives. And at worst, that antinomianism is actually intended. What they succeeded in doing is cheapening the grace of God, and rendering Christ's life and death unnecessary in their theology. But Isaiah 64:6 says "we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." And, in Romans 4:5, God "justifies the ungodly." Hodge says, "low views of the evil of sin and of the justice of God lie at the foundation of all false views of this great doctrine."

It's true that there's no such thing as justification without sanctification, however, as Hodge says,

...the Reformers maintained that by justification the Scriptures mean something different from sanctification. That the two gifts, although inseparable, are distinct, and that justification, instead of being an efficient act changing the inward character of the sinner, is a declarative act, announcing and determining his relation to the law and justice of God.

Renihan says that,

justification is a further link in the chain forged in chapter three [that's "Of the Decree"] and continued through the Confession.

And Perkins' *ordo salutis* shows it as separate. Renihan also says that

Puritan covenant theology did not view the various elements of the *ordo salutis* [application of salvation] in isolation, for they link in specific ways. One leads to the next and is incomplete without its companion. While we for the sake of convenient categorization in study, separate them into logical units, that must be recognized as a somewhat artificial device.

Therefore we don't acknowledge any kind of justification without sanctification—no "carnal Christians."

The next denial-affirmation pair speaks of the ground, or basis of our pardon. "Not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone." God would be unjust to pardon us by simply dismissing the charges. If Proverbs says that it an abomination to justify the wicked then how can God, how can it be that he's "faithful and just to forgive us our sins." How can he be "just and justifier?"

Romans 3:24 says we're,

justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: <sup>25</sup> Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins. . .

So then,

The ground of justification is the righteousness of Christ imputed to the believer<sup>7</sup>.

The doctrine of Justification doesn't teach mere pardon. It's pardon on the basis of satisfaction. Presidential pardons aren't always justice. Dismissing a charge is not the same as satisfying a legal demand.

The third denial-affirmation pair deals with means, or method. "Not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing Christ's active obedience

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<sup>7</sup>Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 116.

unto the whole law, and passive obedience in His death for their whole and sole righteousness”

I think this reference to “faith itself,” “the act of believing,” and “evangelical obedience” hints a little at Arminian, or Molinist ideas. Though many of them would deny it, their theology makes faith a meritorious act. That is, they make faith an inherent quality in the believer, which becomes the basis on which God justifies a sinner. But for us, faith is instrumental. In other words, when we say “saved by Faith,” we don’t mean “saved on the basis of faith,” but, rather “saved by means of faith.”

In previous chapters the active, and passive obedience of Christ were alluded to; they’re explicitly mentioned now. This is a reference to his righteous life, and his death. We’ve even codified it in song:

My hope is built on nothing less  
than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;

Both types of obedience are necessary for us. If our lives were ledgers, we’d have countless debits, and no deposit. The imputation of Christ’s death pays off our debits. The imputation of his righteous life gains us entry into the family of God—the adoption.

The next phrase is important: Christ’s obedience is imputed for our “whole and sole righteousness.” Christ’s obedience is our whole righteousness. We can’t add anything to it. We have nothing to add to it. It’s our sole, or only righteousness. Nothing submitted in its place will make us right with God. Not our own righteousness. No amount of penitential “Our Fathers” or “Hail Marys.” Nor the right level of emotion at the altar call.

In the last phrase it’s affirmed that not even the faith is ours. It says we’re “receiving, and resting on him.” The term faith covers a number of concepts. There’s belief, assent, loyalty, faithfulness, trust... This “receiving, and resting” sounds like trust to me. “Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein<sup>8</sup>.” This kind of faith isn’t “right notion that is in us concerning God and divine things.” This is “nothing in my hand I bring” faith. Remember being a little kid? You never really thought “gee, I really owe mom and dad. If I don’t do something, they’ll make me live on the street.”

### 3 The instrumental means of justification (2)

#### *Faith and Justification*

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<sup>8</sup>Mark 10:5

Faith thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet it is not alone in the person justified, but ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.

The ground of justification is not faith. Faith is the *instrument*, or *condition* of justification.

The proximate effect of this union, and, consequently, the second effect of faith, is justification. We are “justified by the faith of Christ.” (Gal. ii. 16.) “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” (Rom. vii. 1.) “He that believeth on him is not condemned.” (John iii. 18.) Faith is the condition on which God promises in the covenant of redemption, to impute unto men the righteousness of Christ. As soon, therefore, as they believe, they cannot be condemned.

So we’re elect from all eternity, but not justified from all eternity. Decree, and election happen in eternity. Calling, faith, justification, adoption, and sanctification all take place in history.

We’re saved through faith alone, but faith is never alone. If faith is alone, it’s called “dead faith.” This is a reference to James 2:

<sup>14</sup> What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, <sup>16</sup> And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? <sup>17</sup> Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. <sup>18</sup> Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. <sup>19</sup> Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

So our confession says that faith is always “accompanied with all other saving graces.” You’re gonna see some kind of change in your life. It says faith works by love. Matthew 22:

<sup>37</sup> Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. <sup>38</sup>

This is the first and great commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

And John 14:

<sup>15</sup> ¶ If ye love me, keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup> And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; <sup>17</sup> Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

## 4 Brian Borgman Justification Quiz<sup>9</sup>

### 4.1 1

A). God gives a man right standing with Himself by mercifully accounting him righteous.

B). God gives a man right standing with Himself by actually making him into a righteous person.

A

### 4.2 2

A). God gives a man right standing with Himself by placing Christ's goodness and virtue to his credit.

B). God gives a man right standing with Himself by putting Christ's goodness and virtue into his heart.

A

### 4.3 3

A). God accepts the believer because of the moral excellence found in Christ.

B). God makes a believer acceptable by infusing Christ's moral excellence into his life.

A

### 4.4 4

A). If a man becomes born again, he will achieve right standing with God.

B). If a sinner receives right standing with God, he will then experience a transformation of character and life.

B

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<sup>9</sup><https://web.archive.org/web/20100925075922/http://defendingcontending.com/2010/09/21/are-you-a-roman-catholic-or-a-christian/>

**4.5 5**

- A). We receive right standing with God through faith alone.
- B). We receive right standing with God by faith and love.

A

**4.6 6**

- A). We achieve right standing with God by having Christ live out His life of obedience in us.
- B). We achieve right standing with God by receiving the truth that he obeyed the Law of God perfectly for us.

B

**4.7 7**

- A). We achieve right standing with God by following Christ's example by the help of enabling grace.
- B). We follow Christ's example because His life has given us right standing with God.

B

**4.8 8**

- A). God first declares us good, and then His Spirit begins making us good.
- B). God sends His Spirit to make us good, and then He will declare that we are good.

A

**4.9 9**

- A). Christ's finished work on the cross and intercession at God's right hand gives us favor in God's sight.
- B). It is the indwelling Christ that gives us favor in God's sight.

A

#### **4.10 10**

A). Only by the imputation of Christ's righteousness can we fully satisfy the claims of the Ten Commandments.

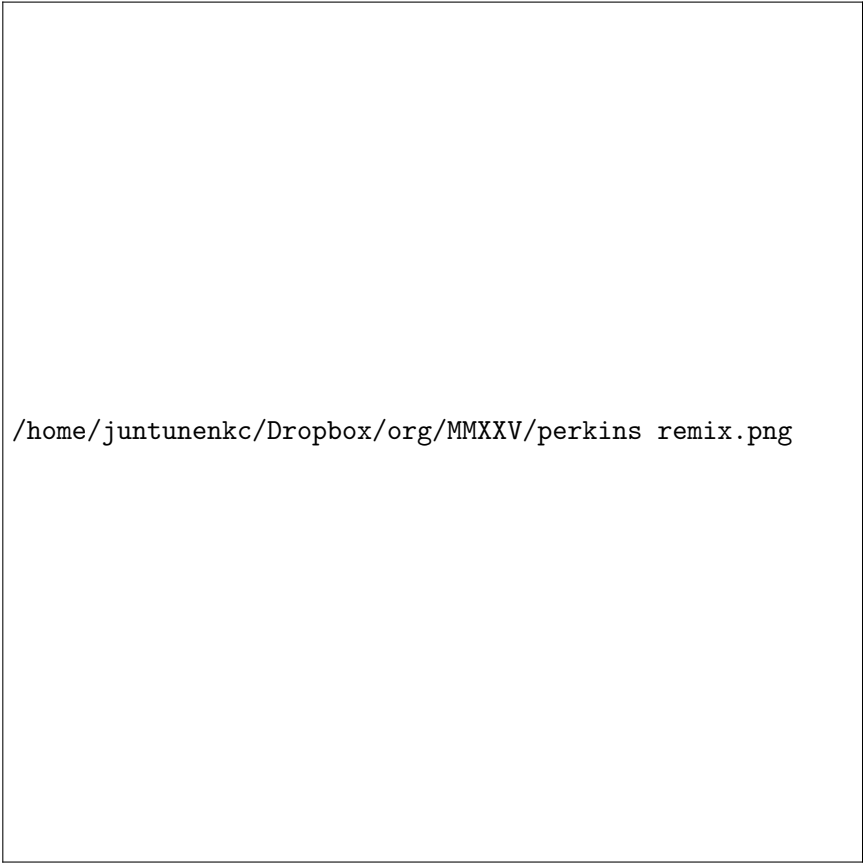
B). By the power of the Holy Spirit living in us we can fully satisfy the claims of the Ten Commandments.

A

#### **4.11 Answer key**

1: A 2: A 3: A 4: B 5: A 6: B 7: B 8: A 9: A 10: A

### **5 Sequence of salvation**



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Figure 1: Perkins *Ordo Salutis*



Figure 2: Bunyan *Ordo Salutis*