

Mary Craig Ministries, Inc.

Series: The Benefits Of Salvation

## **Justification, One of Three Divine Acts**

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In this message, we consider justification, one of three divine acts. To begin, let's listen to what I have taken from the Westminster Confession of Faith:

Those whom God effectually calls, He also freely justifies. He does this,

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 the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them.

They receive and rest on Christ and His righteousness, by faith; which faith they have not of themselves but as a gift of God. 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 is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but works by love.

[Believers are justified by faith alone but not by a faith that is alone. It is an act of free grace such that a believer does not have to do anything else to be justified. The act of justification does nothing in you; it is not a subjective experience. It is objective—an act of declaration by which one is declared justified before a holy God. The ground of justification is the righteousness of Christ; the instrument is that it is through faith alone.]

Christ, by His obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to His Father's justice in their behalf. Yet, inasmuch as He was given by the Father for them; and His obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead; and both, freely, not for anything in them; their justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.

God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification; nevertheless, they are not justified, until the Holy Spirit does, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them.

God does continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified; and, although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may, by their sins, fall under God's fatherly displeasure, and not have the light of His countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.

The justification of believers under the old testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the new testament.

The above, apart from what is in brackets, is taken from the *Westminster Confession of Faith, XI/i-vi*.

Consider these Scriptures:

Romans 3:19-30 - **19**Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; **20**because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin. **21**But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, **22**even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; **23**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **24**being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; **25**whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This* was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; **26**for the demonstration, *I* say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

**27**Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. **28**For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. **29**Or is God *the God* of Jews only? Is He not *the God* of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, **30**since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. NASB

Romans 4:5-8 - **4**Now the wages of the worker are not credited as a gift, but as an obligation. **5**However, to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. **6**And David speaks likewise of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: **7**“Blessed are they whose lawless acts are forgiven, whose sins are covered. **8**Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.”

Acts 10:43 - To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

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. KJV

Romans 5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, [NKJV] **17**For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

**18**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. **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. NASB

Romans 8:1, 33-35 – 1 *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.* 33Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34who 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. 35Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?  
NASB

Imputation: The devil is defeated legally and judicially. Here's how.

Justification is a wholly objective judicial judgment concerning the sinner's standing before the Law. Imputation means that Adam's original sin and the individual sinner's sin are imputed to Christ; and Christ's righteousness is imputed to the sinner who has repented and believed Jesus. God determines this judgment and pardons the sinner, who is "in Christ." The imputation of Christ's obedience and satisfaction to Him is the ground by which God judges the sinner to be righteous. Romans 4:5-8; Acts 10:43; Romans the fifth chapter. On the basis of God's constituting the ungodly man righteous, He **declares** the ungodly person righteous in His sight. In its declarative character, justification possesses an **eschatological dimension**, for it amounts to the divine verdict of the Eschaton being brought forward into time and rendered here and now concerning the sinner. By God's act of justifying him, the sinner, as it were, has been brought, before the time, to the Final Judgment and has already passed successfully through it, having been acquitted of any and all charges brought against him. Thus the believer has judicial acquittal now.

**Its character as a judicial determination and as a legal judgment.** In justification, God does not make the believer anything; it is **a declaration of right standing before Him only**. It is an act of God. It is a legal judgment. The verbs used have a declarative sense, i.e., to deem worthy not to make worthy, or **to declare to be like not to make like**. Consider:

Deuteronomy 25:1 The judges did not make the man righteous; rather, they declared him to be what the evidence of the case demanded. The antithesis of justification is invariably condemnation, which is also a judicial and legal determination.

Job 32:2 According to Elihu, Job "justified himself before God." In Elihu's opinion, Job was arguing his innocence before God; that is declaring himself righteous before God. (eli-who)

Proverbs 17:15 That judge who for bribe (cf. 17.23) declared the wicked man to be righteous or who declared the righteous man to be guilty in either case provoked the Lord to anger. A judge is to hand down just judgments and not to take bribes.

Matthew 12:37; Romans 5:16; Romans 8:33, 34; Psalm 143:2; Romans 3:19, 20

**The righteousness of justification.** Some use Genesis 15:6 ("Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it [that is, his faith] to him as righteousness") along with other passages like Romans 4:3, 5, 9, 22, 23 and Galatians 3:6 and James 2:23 as showing that it is *our* faith-act that is the ground or the cause of our righteousness. If this were so, then faith would become a meritorious work, and that counters what the NT teaches. We are said to be justified "by faith", "through faith", "upon faith", and "according to

faith". (See Romans 5:2; Romans 1:17; 4:16; 5:1; 9:30; 10:6; Gal 2:16; 3:8, 11, 24; Hebrews 10:38; Romans 3:22, 24, 25, 28, 30; Phil 3:9, Hebrews 11:7.) But we are never said to be justified "because of faith" or "on account of faith" (*dia* in Greek with the accusative). In other words, faith is not the righteousness of justification. That distinction is reserved in Scripture for Christ's God-righteousness alone.

Faith in Christ is simply the regenerated sinner's saving response to God's effectual summons by means of which the righteousness of Christ—the sole ground of justification—is imputed to him.

In Genesis 15:6 it is the righteousness by faith that is contrasted with righteousness by works and that the emphasis falls to such an extent upon this fact that although it is a God-righteousness, yet it is also and with equal emphasis a faith-righteousness. It is the righteousness of God brought to bear upon us because it is by faith, and it is by faith that we become the beneficiaries of this righteousness because it is a God-righteousness. The one complements the other. It is a God-righteousness because it is of divine property; it is a faith righteousness because it is brought to bear upon us by faith. (Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pgs. 358-359)

God the Father, in the very act of justifying the ungodly, imputes to the believer the objective God-righteousness of Jesus Christ, thereby constituting him legally righteous in His sight (which "constituting" act no human judge can do when a guilty party stands before him).

**Justification is a finished work (Romans 5:1).** The believer is justified:

1. in Christ (Isaiah 45:24, 25; Acts 13:39; Romans 8:1; 1Corinthians 6:11; Gal 2:17; Phil 3:9),
2. by Christ's death work (Romans 3:24, 25; 5:9; 8:33, 34),
3. not by our own but by the righteousness of God (Is 61:10; Romans 1:17; 3:21, 22; 10:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil 3:9) and
4. by the righteousness and obedience of Christ (Romans 5:17-19).

**God causes to be the righteous state which He declares to be.** The moment the sinner, through faith in Jesus Christ, turns away from every human resource and rests in Christ alone, the Father imputes His well-beloved Son's preceptive obedience to him and accepts him as righteous in His sight. And the sinner, now a Christian, may praise God for it! What is declared to be is presupposed to be. God constitutes\* by imputation the new and righteous judicial relationship as well as declaring it to be. The declarative act is constitutive. In declaring a believer to be righteous, God imputes the righteousness of another (Christ) to the believer so that Christ is righteous and the believer sees other believers in Him (Christ).

**Imputation and the Devil.** God as Judge has handed down a judicial determination about the believer. Satan accuses and we can own consciousness of sin, but we also own that God says we are righteous because of Christ's righteousness having been accounted to us. Because of justification, the believer does love because Christ did and His love has been imputed to us. That love is not in us, but it is imputed to us as we stand in right standing in Christ before a holy God. Because of all this, we can come boldly to the Throne of Grace to obtain mercy and to find grace and favor in a timely way. Hebrews 4:16.

\*Definition of constitute: to establish, to set up in a legal form, to appoint, to form or compose.

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