

Chapter 36 Justification (Right Legal Standing Before God)

How and when do we gain right legal standing before God?

Definition - Justification is an instantaneous legal act of God in which he:

- (1) thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ's righteousness as belonging to us
- (2) declares us to be righteous in his sight

- A. Justification includes a legal declaration by God ("to declare righteous")
 1. "To justify" commonly means "to declare righteous" (forensic = having to do with legal proceedings)
 2. Scriptural examples (Luke 7:29; Romans 4:5; Romans 8:33-34; Prov. 17:15)
- B. God declares us to be just in his sight
 1. God declares that we have no penalty to pay for sin (Rom. 8:1, 4:6-8)
 - a) Yet forgiveness of sins is only one part of justification
 - b) Forgiveness makes us morally neutral, but does not give us favor with God
 2. God also declares that we are righteous in his sight
 - a) God must declare us to have the merits of perfect righteousness before him.
 - b) Scriptural examples (Isa. 61:10; Rom. 3:21-22; Rom. 4:3, 5:19)
- C. God can declare us to be just because he *imputes* Christ's righteousness to us
 1. Imputes = God thinks of Christ's righteousness as belonging to us (Rom. 4:3; 1 Cor. 1:30; Phil. 3:9; Rom. 4:6-8)
 2. Imputation is essential to the heart of the gospel
 - a) Imputation has happened twice already:
 - i. When Adam sinned, his guilt was imputed to us.
 - ii. When Christ suffered and died for our sins, our sin was imputed to Christ
 - b) If justification changed us internally and then declared us to be righteous based on how good we actually were,
 - i. we could never be declared perfectly righteous in this life because of remaining sin
 - ii. there would be no provision for forgiveness of past sin (committed before we were changed internally), and therefore we could never have confidence that we are right before God
 3. Traditional Roman Catholic view of justification:
 - a) Justification is something that changes us internally and makes us more holy within ("sanctifying and renewing of the inner man")
 - b) Righteousness is infused, NOT imputed
 - c) People cannot be sure if they are in a "state of grace"
 - d) People can experience varying degrees of justification
 - e) Our eternal life with God is based both on God's grace and our merits
 4. Response to Roman Catholic view of justification
 - a) This classification only blurs the issue and ultimately makes forgiveness of sins and right legal standing before God a matter of our own merit, not a free gift from God.
 - b) Therefore, this blurring of distinctions ultimately destroys the heart of the gospel.
- D. Justification comes to us entirely by God's grace, not on account of any merit in ourselves (Rom. 3:23-24; Eph. 2:8-9)
- E. God justifies us through our faith in Christ (Gal. 2:16; Rom. 5:1)
 1. Why did God choose *faith*?
 - a) Faith is the one attitude of heart that is the exact opposite of depending on ourselves.
 - b) Scriptural examples (Rom. 4:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 3:20)
 2. What about James 2:18-26?
Especially verse 24 - "You see that a man is *justified by works* and not by faith alone."
 3. James is using justified to mean "demonstrate or show to be righteous," not "declare to be righteous"
 - a) Jesus to the Pharisees (Luke 16:15)
 - b) Jesus and the Lawyer (Luke 10:28-29)

- c) The context of James 2:18-26
 - i. Jas. 2:21 - James is referring to something later in Abraham's life, long after God justified Abraham once for all, reckoning righteousness to him as a result of his faith.
 - ii. James is affirming a different truth, that an outward showing that one is righteous only occurs as we see evidence in their life.
- 4. Practical implications of justification by faith alone:
 - a) This doctrine enables us to offer genuine hope to unbelievers who know they could never make themselves righteous before God.
 - b) This doctrine gives us confidence that God will never make us pay the penalty for sins that have been forgiven on Christ's merits.

Questions for Personal Application

1. Are you confident that God has declared you "not guilty" forever in his sight? Did you do anything to deserve justification?
2. If you think of yourself standing before God on the day of judgment, would you think that it is enough simply to have your sins all forgiven, or would you also feel a need to have the righteousness of Christ reckoned to your account?
3. Describe how you would feel about your relationship to God if you held the Roman Catholic view of justification. Do Roman Catholics you know hold that church's traditional view?
4. Have you ever wondered if God is still continuing to punish you for past sins? How does the doctrine of justification help to answer that question?