

GABC One-Day Seminar: JUSTIFICATION

4/12/2025

INTRODUCTION

Why study doctrine? Jn 17:3, 8:31-32; Rom. 12:3; Jer. 3:15

Pragmatism is what happens when **results** direct the mind and heart.

Rationalization is what happens when **feelings** shape the mind and hands.

Sanctification is what happens when **the truth** shapes the heart and directs the hands.

John Dagg: "The study of religious truth ought to be undertaken and prosecuted from a sense of duty, and with a view to the improvement of the **heart**. When learned, it ought not to be laid on the shelf, as an object of speculation; but it should be deposited deep in the heart, where its **sanctifying** power ought to be felt."

Colossian 1:9-11: "be filled with the **knowledge** of God's will in all **spiritual** wisdom and understanding, so as to **walk** in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and **patience** with **joy**."

Why start with Justification?

This doctrine is the beginning of Christ exalting **religion**.

This doctrine is the beginning of true **theology**, to knowledge of the true **holiness** of God, and the true **love** of God.

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY SURVEY

Survey of Forgiveness and Faith in the Old Testament

Big Idea: Old Testament Religion was based on **faith** and **forgiveness**, not **works**.

Today we will look at a few key **promises**, and **prayers**, to see on what the Old Testament saints based their **hope**.

- Did they expect to have peace with God because of their own **righteousness** as something they **deserved**?
- Or did they expect to have peace with God through God's **mercy**, and **unmerited forgiveness**?

Adam and Eve - Gen. 3:15

Abraham - Gen. 15:6, "And he **believed** the Lord, and he counted it to him as **righteousness**."

Moses

- Exodus 34:6-7 "The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God **merciful** and **gracious**, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, **forgiving** iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."
- Numbers 14:18 "Please **pardon** the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have **forgiven** this people, from Egypt until now."

Isaiah

- 1:18 "Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."
- 30:15-18 "For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, "In **returning** and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in **trust** shall be your strength." But you were unwilling, and you said,

"No! We will flee upon horses"... Therefore, the Lord waits to be **gracious** to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show **mercy** to you. For the Lord is a God of **justice**; blessed are all those who wait for him."

- 43:25 "'I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins."
- 45:22-25
- 53: 1-3, 4-6, 10-12

Job 4:17-19, 9:2-4, 15:14-16

The Psalms

- 2:12, 6:1, 25:11-14
- 32: 1-2 "Blessed is the one whose transgression is **forgiven**, whose sin is **covered**. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord **counts** no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit."
- 51:1-2 "Have **mercy** on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy **blot out** my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!"
- 62:5-8; 89:1-4; 103:2-5
- 130:3-4,7 "If you, O Lord, should **mark** iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is **forgiveness**, that you may be **feared**... O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption."
- 143:2 Enter not into judgment with your servant, for **no one** living is **righteous** before you.

Key "Forgiveness" of sins Terms

- Deliver: Psalm 39:8, 51:14
- Not impute/count: Psalm 32:2
- Forget and not remember: Isaiah 43:25, Jeremiah 31:34
- Cast behind the back: Isaiah 38:17
- Blot out: Psalm 51:1,9; Isaiah 43:25
- Forgive/pardon: Exodus 34:9, Psalm 32:1

Old Testament Religion hangs on the **mercy** of God, and the **forgiveness** of sins, with **no room** for hope in **one's own** righteousness before God.

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament proclaim God's **holiness** in his law, and his **mercy** through the **forgiveness** of sin. There has only ever been **ONE** way of salvation.

Survey of Forgiveness and Faith in the Gospels

"Justification by Faith" is Pauline terminology, but the **substance** is central to each part of the Bible, the Gospels are no exception.

Peace with God through the **forgiveness** of sins by **faith** in Jesus apart from works and merit is the central theme of the Gospels.

Elements of Jesus' preaching

- High and Holy Law: Matt. 5:17,20; 19:17
- Spirituality of the Law: Matt. 5:21-22; John 5:45-46
- Penalty of the Law: Mark 9:47-48

- Need for inner reformation/renewal: John 3:3; John 8:39, 44
- Forgiveness of sins: Luke 18:13-14
- Free Grace from Love: John 3:16; Luke 15:21-24
- Christ as Substitute: Matthew 20:28; Matthew 26:28-29; Mark 10:45

Jesus Demonstrates the Gospel

Note on Jesus Miracles – they show us...

- *Not* what is **normal**
- **Who** Jesus is
- Who can **be saved**
- What it **takes** to be saved
- What it **means** to be saved

Survey of Matthew 5-9

Beatitudes (5:3-11) – (3-5) we come with **nothing**, (6) we are **given** an alien righteousness, (7-9) we are **transformed** to do good works.

Matthew 8-9

- **8:2-3** - Leper - "you can make me clean"
- 5-13 - The Centurion - "with no one in Israel have I found such faith"
- 14-17 - "Heals many" - Quotes Isaiah 53:4 "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."
- 23-27 - Calms a storm
- 28-34 - Rescues the demon possessed men
- **9:1-8** - Heals a paralytic
- 18-26 - Woman with the issue of blood, and raises a girl back to life - "Take heart, your faith has made you well"
- 27-31 - Two blind men "according to their faith"
- 32 - A mute man.

Jesus' call to discipleship (Matthew 5-7) is not about calling the Righteous, but **sinners** (9:13). Jesus doesn't reward the righteous, but he heals sinners by **faith**. He calls sinners to come to him by faith, be healed (forgiven) and made into his **disciples**.

The point of Jesus' healing ministry is that we can have **forgiveness** of our sins through **faith** in Jesus Christ.

Paul **Tells**, Matthew **Shows**.

Key Pauline Texts

The theme of Romans in 1:1-6 "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God..."

- *Historical* dimension: "which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh..."
- *Theological* dimension: "and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord..."
- *Redemptive* dimension: "through whom we have received grace and apostleship..."
- *Practical* dimension: "to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ"

Romans At a Glance

- 1-4 Doctrine: Justification by Faith Alone
- 5-7 Difficult Question: Sin and Suffering
- 8-11 Difficult Question: God's Faithfulness, Promises, and Election

- 12-15:13; Application – what is the obedience of faith?
- 15:14-16: Conclusion and final greetings.

Survey of Romans 1-4

Intro to the gospel – 1:16-17

Condemnation of the Greeks – 1:18-32

Condemnation of the Jews – Chapter 2

Forms of self-righteousness: **Moralism** (2:1-3), **Favoritism** (2:12-24), and **Formalism** (2:25-29).

All are condemned by works, saved only by faith – Chapter 3

Romans 3:21-31

- The righteousness of God is a **gift**, not something earned.
- We are justified by receiving this gift righteousness through **faith**.
- This gift righteousness satisfies both God's **mercy** and his **justice**.
- This gift righteousness leaves no room for **boasting**.

Case Study: Abraham – Chapter 4

Romans 5:1-2

Romans 8:1-2

Romans 12:1-2

Ephesians 2:1-10

1-3 - All stand **condemned**, none justified by works

4 - The 'why' - **mercy** overflowing from **love**

5-6 - The 'what' - made alive by **grace**, raised us up with Christ

7 - The 'purpose' the 'telos' - to **display** his immeasurable grace in **kindness**

8 - Grace through **faith**

9 - Again, **boasting** is excluded

10 - Good works **follow** salvation. Saved **for** good works, not **because of** good works.

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HISTORY SURVEY

Two big ideas

1. Controversy creates clarity.
2. To move away from Justification by Faith Alone is to move towards BOTH legalism and license.

Legalism says, “I have peace with God through my own works and merit.”

License says, “sin isn’t really a big deal.”

In times when the doctrine of Justification by Faith is lost, forgotten, or misunderstood...

Monastic asceticism will gain popularity.

Moral decay will increase.

And religious formalism will return.

The further a culture or a church gets from Justification by Faith alone, the more common nominalism will become.

Nominalism: Christian in name only, Christianity without Spiritual renewal, Christianity without the power. “Almost Christians,” or “unsaved Christians.”

Nominalism thrives on a high view of Christian forms and rituals, and a low view of sin and God’s holiness.

Civic morality: outward moral observance that judges oneself based on a societal average.

In merit-based systems, true spiritual renewal is never sought because it is not needed. Take the sacrament, and don’t kill anyone, and you’ll be saved.

History of the Doctrine of Justification

Outline of Church History, Four Major Sections

- Patristic Era (‘Fathers’) 100 or so to about 500 AD
- Medieval Era, 500 AD to 1517
- Reformation/Post-Reformation Era, 1517 to 1850ish
- Modern Era, 1850ish to present

Patristic Era (100-500)

- Controversies
 - o Manichaeism
 - Dualism: two equal and opposite forces in the cosmos
 - Fatalism: all is predetermined, works are pointless
 - o Marcionism (2nd Century)
 - View that OT God and NT God are different
 - Led to an embarrassment about the distinction between Law and Grace.
 - o Pelagianism (383-417)
 - “Since perfection is possible for man, it is obligatory”¹
 - Confronting an apathetic nominalism.
 - Pelagius saw Christian assurance as an obstacle to genuine moral reform.

¹ Pelagius, *ad Demetriadem*.

- Pelagius believed one is not **justified** until he is perfectly **sanctified**.
 - Pelagius denied the fall - Adam was just a bad **example** and Christ just a good **example**.
 - “Pelagius defined God’s grace, not in terms of the inner renewing power of the Holy Spirit, but as the **moral law**, the example of Christ, and the persuasive power of rewards and punishments.”²
- Key People/Writings
- Epistle to Diognetus (2nd century) “...he himself gave his own son, a **ransom** on our behalf, the Holy for the **lawless**, the innocent for the **guilty**, the righteous for the unrighteous, the incorruptible for the corruptible, the immortal for the mortal... Oh, the sweet **exchange**! ... Oh, the unexpected benefits that the lawlessness of many should be concealed in the one righteous, and the righteousness of the **one** should **justify** many lawless.”³
 - Origen (184-253), Alexandria, Egypt
 - Free grace through faith
 - “He is saying that the justification of faith **alone** suffices, so that the one who only believes is **justified**, even if he has not accomplished a **single work**.”⁴
 - “The root of righteousness, therefore, does not grow out of the works, but rather the fruit of works grows out of the root of righteousness, that root, of course, of righteousness which God also **credits** even **apart** from works.”⁵
 - Free grace for *past* sins
 - “It justifies those who have been cleansed from their **past crimes** and makes them capable of receiving the glory of God.”⁶
 - “The remission [of sins] is not given for **future** crimes, but **only** past ones.”⁷
 - Salvation is *earned*
 - “Someone becomes an heir of God when he **merits** receiving the things that belong to God.”⁸
 - (On Romans 8:28-30) “The cause of each person’s salvation is not placed in the foreknowledge of God but in one’s own **purpose** and **actions**.”⁹
 - Athanasius of Alexandria (Egypt, 296 - 373 AD) - From *On the Incarnation*, 56 (330 AD)
 - “But just as this had to be [saving his image bearers from corruption], so also on the other hand the consistency of God lies against it, so that God should appear true in his legislation concerning death.”
 - “What then had to happen in this case or what should God do? Demand **repentance** from human beings for their transgression?”
 - “But repentance would neither have preserved the consistency [justice] of God, for he again would not have remained true if human beings were not held fast by death.”

² Nick Needham, *2000 Years of Christ’s Power*, Vol. I, 418.

³ Apostolic Fathers, 286.

⁴ Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Books 1-5, 225-226.

⁵ Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Books 1-5, 245.

⁶ Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Books 1-5, 215.

⁷ Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Books 1-5, 228.

⁸ Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Books 6-10, 64.

⁹ Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Books 6-10, 91.

- “Being the Word of the Father and above all, he alone [the Son, Jesus] consequently was both **able** to recreate the universe and was **worthy** to suffer on behalf of all and to intercede for all before the Father.”
- Basil the Great (One of the Three Cappadocian (Turkey) Fathers, 330-379 AD) “Indeed, this is the perfect and complete glorification of God, when one does not exult in **his own** righteousness, but recognizing oneself as lacking true righteousness to be justified by faith **alone** in Christ.” *Homily on Humility* 9 (ca. 375 AD).
- John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople (modern Istanbul), d. 407 AD. “They said that he who adhered to faith alone was **cursed**; but he, Paul, shows that he who adhered to faith **alone** is blessed.” *Homily on Galatians* 3 (ca. 385).
- Augustine
 - (Commenting on Romans 3:21) “not that whereby He is Himself righteous, but that with which He **endows** man when He justifies the ungodly.”¹⁰
 - “For no one acts justly unless he has been **justified**”¹¹
 - “One’s justification is obtained by **faith** in Jesus Christ – both in so far as it is begun within us in reality and in so far as its perfection is waited for in hope.”¹²
 - “Why, indeed, is it called grace? Because it is given gratuitously. For by no **precedent** merits didst thou buy what thou hast received. The sinner, therefore, received this grace **first**, that his sins should be forgiven him... Good works **follow** after a justified person; they do not go before, in order that he may be justified.”¹³
 - He approvingly quotes Cyprian (210 - 248 AD) who says, “We must boast in nothing, since nothing is our own.”¹⁴
 - Summary of Late Augustine: justification is all of God, all from **unconditional** election, yet, justification is a **process** that begins and is carried along by faith, but nevertheless results in final justification on the basis of **works** – albeit works wrought by and through the grace of God through faith.

Medieval Era (500-1500)

- Anselm (1033 – 1109) – Archbishop of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo* (Or, *Why God Became Man*, or better, *Why the God Man*) “In order, therefore, that a God-Man should bring about what is necessary [satisfaction of God’s law], it is essential that the **same** one person who will make the recompense should be perfect God and perfect man. For he **cannot** do this if he is not true God, and he has no **obligation** to do so if he is not a true man.”¹⁵
- Medieval Riddles
 - How do we reconcile a **transformative** view of justification (merit) with the Bible’s clear teaching on the **priority** of grace?
 - What does the work of Christ have to do with it all?
 - We will see that **merit** and **grace** cannot be mixed together.
 - Aquinas struggles to hold them together, but in the end comes up with an **unstable** synthesis.

¹⁰ Augustine, *A Treatise on the Spirit and the Letter* 14-15 (NPNF 5:88-89).

¹¹ Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* 110:3.

¹² Augustine, *A Treatise on the Spirit and the Letter* 51, 105.

¹³ Augustine in, Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*, 90.

¹⁴ Cyprian, *Testimonies to Quirinus* 3.4 (ANF 5:528), quoted by Augustine in *On the Predestination of the Saints* 7 (NPNF 5:500).

¹⁵ Anselm, *The Major Works*, 321.

- But in successive generations merit wins out, and grace becomes more and more of a **technicality**, until it is almost completely **ignored**.
- Aquinas (1225 – 1274)
 - “The first [step in salvation] is the **infusion** of grace; the second, the free-will’s movement towards God; the third, the free-will’s movement towards sin; the fourth, the remission of sin.”¹⁶
 - Instantaneous justification: “The cause of the ungodly’s justification is the Holy Spirit’s justifying grace... thus the justification of the ungodly is not consecutive, but **instantaneous** ... It follows that God’s justification of the ungodly occurs in an **instant**.”¹⁷
 - (Election) **Start**: undeserved Grace – **unconditional** election
 - (Sanctification) **Progress**: cooperation with undeserved grace
 - (Justification) **Finish**: condign merit
 - Condign and Congruent merit
 - Condign: “equal dignity” > ‘**real**’ merit
 - Congruent: “agreeable/harmonious” > ‘**artificial**’ merit
- Scotus (1265 – 1308 AD)
 - “We can merit both the gift of eternal life and an **increase** of merit.”
 - Start: grace through foreseen merit
 - Progress: congruent merit
 - Finish: congruent merit
- Ockham (1285 – 1349 AD)
 - “Pelagius held that grace is not in fact required in order to have eternal life, but that an act elicited in a purely natural state merits eternal life condignly [in and of its own inherent worth]. I, on the other hand, claim that such an act is meritorious only through God’s absolute power accepting it as such,” [ie. Congruently].¹⁸
 - Start: congruent merit
 - Progress: congruent merit
 - Finish: congruent merit
 - Roman Catholic church historian Joseph Lortz, “the Occamistic system ‘as a matter of fact makes of grace a **superfluous** appendix.’”¹⁹
- Biel (1420 – 1495 AD) “New Pelagianism”
 - Start: congruent merit
 - Finish: congruent merit
 - “Christ has opened the doors of salvation, but now we have to enter through them by subjugating our... exterior man to the rule of Christ, the law.”²⁰
 - “One can only profit from [Christ’s work] by acquiring **merits** through fulfilling the law in its **totality** according to the example of Christ in his earthly life.”²¹
 - “If you do what is in you, God will not deny you grace”
 - Old: grace moves us to repentance, repentance merits salvation.
 - New: will moves us to repentance, repentance merits grace and salvation.

¹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1a2ae.113.8.

¹⁷ Aquinas, *ST* 1a2ae.113.7.

¹⁸ Ockham, in Horton, 146.

¹⁹ Horton, 158.

²⁰ Biel in Horton, 159.

²¹ Ibid.

- Aquinas wanted to make a place for both merit and grace in salvation. If we try to introduce any merit in salvation, eventually it will make grace entirely **superfluous**. Grace OR merit – they **do not mix**.
- Movement away from the merits of **Christ** entailed a movement towards sacramentalism and civic morality on the practical side – movement away from Biblical justification leads to both legalism and license (**Nominalism**).

Reformation/Post-Reformation Era, 1517 to 1850ish

- The practical dimension: Penitential system of Luther's day – sale of indulgences
 - **Penance** for pardon to satisfy the penalty of the law. Purgatory took care of what was lacking in life.
 - Personal fulfillment of the **precept** of the law through infused grace. Supererogation (merits of the saints) took care of what was lacking
 - Storehouse of **merits** – this supererogatory merit piles up over time
 - Papal **stewardship** – the Pope is the overseer of this storehouse and has the sole authority to use it to pardon sin, and satisfy the law.
- Michael Horton: "Luther's initial protest was provoked by his sense that the penitential system had made salvation **too easy**! People imagined that they were in a state of grace when they were not – carnal **security** was actually Luther's initial provocation... The sale of indulgences merely added to this mockery, as if one could buy God off for a few guilders and return to the brothel."²²
- Horton: "Luther's initial protest was not excited by a discovery of free grace but by a sense that the church had come to the place where it no longer took God **seriously**."²³
- Luther's reforms
 - **Forensic** Justification instead of transformative
 - Penal **substitute** instead of penance
 - **Alien** righteousness instead of inherent
 - Relationship of justification and sanctification – instead of **confusion**
 - Simul iustus et peccator: simultaneously justified and a **sinner**.

Post-reformation errors

- Anti-nomianism: Christ **nullified** the law.
- Neo-nomianism: Christ established a **new** law.

Great Awakening, mid 1700s (UK, USA)

Nominalism reigned

Whitefield, UK

- Arnold Dallimore, Whitefield's biographer describes the English church in that day this way, "English Christianity proved itself to be little more than a religious ethic, sedate and timid."²⁴
- In college Whitefield was a part of a group called "the Holy Club" with the Wesley brothers. Dallimore describes the club saying, "It was not **evangelical**. Its members knew nothing of the inward miracle of the **new birth**, and in their search for spiritual satisfaction, turned increasingly to outward **ritual**."²⁵
- He describes the effect of his early ministry, "The doctrine of the New Birth and Justification by Faith... made its way like **lightning** into the hearers' consciences."²⁶

²² Horton, 168.

²³ Ibid. 171.

²⁴ Dallimore, *Whitefield*, 22.

²⁵ Ibid. 71.

²⁶ Ibid., 128.

Modern Era (1850-Today) Issues to Note

New **Perspective** on Paul²⁷

- Key Players: E.P. Sanders, James Dunn, N.T. Wright
- “Covenantal Nomism” In by grace, stay in by **obedience**
 - o “Obedience **maintains** one’s position in the covenant, but it does not **earn** God’s grace as such. It simply keeps an individual in the group which is the recipient of God’s grace... Works are the **condition** of remaining ‘in,’ but they do not earn salvation.”²⁸
 - o “Israel’s righteousness was not so much something to be **achieved** by self-effort; rather it was understood and measured in terms of **obedience** to the law of the covenant, faithfulness to the terms of the covenant.”²⁹
- Three key arguments they make:
 - o They argue that this is the “second temple” view.
 - o They argue that this is a correct interpretation of the OT itself.
 - o They argue that Paul basically affirmed this,

De-centering the **legal** dimension

- Tends to condemn the **forensic** perspective as a “Western” image.
- The idea is that the west is really into guilt and innocence, the east is in to **honor** and shame, and more tribal cultures are more sensitive to **fear** and power dynamics.
- Fails to see that the Reformation was in part sparked by a retrieval of the **Hebrew** emphasis on forensic justification.
- The Bible teaches that our primary **need** is justification by faith alone – this is the core of the gospel. Everything else is **downstream** of that.

Increased interest in ascetic **practices**

- When **tradition**, and mystical practices supersede the **plain** teaching of the Bible, the doctrine of Justification by faith has long ago been **eclipsed**.

Continued threat of **nominalism**

- If we emphasize **works**, we breed nominalism.
- If we emphasize **justification** and the new birth, genuine conversion happens, and genuine God-pleasing good works flow.
- If we turn attention away from God’s Holiness and Glory, and towards man’s **felt** needs, it’s no wonder that the doctrine of **Justification** should become **unintelligible**.

The Need in Our Generation

Recovery of the gospel of Justification by Faith alone.

This is how we will recover a deep sense of God’s **holiness**.

This is how we will recover a deep sense of God’s **love**.

²⁷ Broadly following M. Horton’s critique in *Justification*, vol. II, 97-114.

²⁸ Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 420, 543.

²⁹ James Dunn, “Paul, Grace and ERGA NOMOU,” in *Ancient Perspectives on Paul*, ed. Tobias Nicklas, Andreas Merkt, and Joseph Verheyden, 267.

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THEOLOGY SURVEY

“We are justified in God’s sight **solely** through the righteousness of Christ. In other words, a man is righteous not in himself but because Christ’s righteousness is made over to him by **imputation**.” **John Calvin**, *Institutes*. 16th Century French Refugee.

“This, therefore is that which herein I affirm: - The righteousness of Christ (in his **obedience** and **suffering** for us) imputed unto believers, as they are **united** unto him by his Spirit, is that righteousness whereon they are justified before God, on the account whereof their sins are **pardoned**, and a **right** is granted them unto the heavenly inheritance.” **John Owen**, “The Doctrine of Justification by Faith,” in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. V, 208. 17th Century England.

"What is Justification? It is an act of God's free grace, whereby 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." **Thomas Watson**, *Body of Divinity*, 226. 17th century England.

“That we are justified only by faith in Christ, and not by any manner of virtue or goodness of our own... A person is said to be *justified*, when he is approved of God as **free** from the guilt of sin and its deserved punishment, and as **having** that righteousness belonging to him that entitles to the reward of life.” **Jonathan Edwards**, “Justification by Faith Alone,” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. II, 621-623. 18th Century USA.

“All who believe in Christ, are justified by his righteousness **imputed** to them. Justification is the act of a judge **acquitting** one who is charged with crime... Justification is a higher blessing of grace, than pardon. The latter [pardon] frees from the penalty due to sin, but it does not fully restore the lost favor of God... Justification is attributed, in the Scriptures, to the **blood** and the **obedience** of Christ... Justification is by faith [but] faith does not justify because of its **own** merit... but as renouncing all personal merit and self-reliance, and receiving salvation as a gift of free grace through Jesus Christ... In justification, righteousness is **imputed**, accounted, or reckoned.” **John Dagg**, *Manual of Theology*, 265-267. 19th Century USA

“Of all these benefits, first place is due to justification, for by it we understand that gracious **judicial** act of God by which he acquits humans of all the guilt and punishment of sin and confers on them the right to eternal life.” **Herman Bavinck**, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. III, 179. 20th Century Netherlands.

“Justification is a **judicial** act of God, in which He declares, on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, that all the claims of the law are **satisfied** with respect to the sinner... There is first of all a **negative** element in justification, namely, the remission of sins on the ground of the atoning work of Jesus Christ... There is also a **positive** element in justification which is based more particularly on the active obedience of Christ. In this positive element two parts may be distinguished: The adoption of children... [and] the right to eternal life.” **Louis Berkhof**, *Systematic Theology*, 533-536. 20th Century USA.

Key Themes:

- (1) Justification is **forensic** – it is a legal declaration, and a legal change of status.
- (2) Justification involves **double** imputation – My sin credited to Christ, his righteousness credited to me.
- (3) Justification **satisfies** the righteous law of God - His suffering satisfies the *penalty* of the law for me, and his righteousness fulfills the *precept* of the law for me.
- (4) Justification is by **faith** alone – faith is not a merit, but unites the sinner to Christ, which grounds double imputation.

My Definition of Justification by Faith:

A judicial act of God by which he **accepts** sinners as righteous in a way that both justifies the ungodly, and satisfies his own righteous law

by
accepting Christ's sufferings as satisfaction for the penalty of the law, and Christ's righteousness as **fulfillment** of the precept of the law

on behalf of
those who are **united** to Christ by faith, before any God-pleasing works,
in order that

no one would have anything to **boast** about but rather, both God's justice and mercy would be magnified.

Key Points

- (1) The Law
 - Why the emphasis on the **legal**?
 - The legal dimension, the forensic nature of justification came as a result of a return to the Biblical **languages**.
 - Hebrew – *tsadaq*: “to declare judicially that one’s state is in harmony with the demands of the law; to acquit” (Gen. 15:6; Exod. 23:7; Deut. 25:1; Psalm 143:2; Prov. 17:15; Isa. 5:23; Jer. 3:11).³⁰
 - Greek – *dikaioō*: “to forensically declare a person to be just” (Acts 13:39; Rom. 5:1, 9; 8:30-34; 1 Cor. 6:11; Gal. 2:16; 3:11).³¹
 - Translate into Latin as *iustificare*, from *iustus* (justice) and *facere* (to make) which means to make righteous – thus the Roman emphasis on *transformative* justification. This is based on a simple mistranslation.
 - **Spirituality** of the Law (high bar) – Right Action; Right Obedience, Romans 14:23; Right Motive, Matthew 6:1; Right Affection, Matthew 22:37; Right Goal, 1 Corinthians 10:31.
 - Justification **Magnifies** the Law, and Upholds God's Justice
 - Has the law been **abolished** or not?
 - (2 and 3) Double Imputation
 - Law has two components: **requirements** to be fulfilled, and **punishments** for law-breaking.
 - Isaiah 53, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 3:10-14; 4:4-5, Romans 5:18-19, Romans 8:3-4
 - Atonement
 - (4) Faith, not works
 - What is Faith?
 - Mark 1:15, Hebrews 11:6
 - Faith is a decision of the **will** to embrace Christ and his promises established on a firm conviction of his **truthfulness**. – Both **will** and **knowledge** are needed. (Jn. 1:12, 6:29; 1 Jn. 3:23)
 - Thomas Watson:
 - Self-renunciation (going out of one’s self) “being taken off from our own merits, and seeing we have no righteousness of our own.”
 - Reliance (trust)
 - Appropriation (receiving)
 - Petrus van Mastricht on faith from John 1:12, “they ‘received’ him. That is, they desired to have him as their one and only Mediator as well as their **Priest**, who would redeem them by the offering of his blood; their **King**, who would govern them by his Word and Spirit; and their **Prophet**, who would teach them.”

³⁰ Berkhof, 530.

³¹ Ibid.

- How does faith justify?
 - Not a **work**, Ephesians 2:8-9
 - Accomplishes **union** with Christ, Philippians 3:8-9
 - Edwards, “First we must be *in him*, and then he will be made righteousness or justification to us... Our being *in him* is the ground of our being accepted... So there is a legal **union** between Christ and the true Christian; so that one, in some respects, is accepted for the other by the Supreme Judge.”³²
 - Owen³³ “That which is imputed is the *righteousness of Christ*... his whole obedience unto God, in all that he did and suffered for the church... the foundation of the *imputation* asserted is **union** ... the foundation of this imputation, is that whereby the Lord Christ and believers do actually *coalesce into one mystical person*.”
- Relationship of Justification and Sanctification
 - Justification is a one-time **event**, sanctification is a life-long **process**.
 - Rom. 5:1, 2 Cor. 3:18, Heb. 10:14
 - Both are **merited** by the work of Christ, but justification is effected by the decree of the **Father**, while sanctification is effected by the **power** of the Holy Spirit.
 - That last point raises a special issue: the relation of justification and sanctification.
 - Whoever the Father justifies, the Spirit **sanctifies**.
- Results
 - Simul iustus et peccator
 - Adoption
 - Glory of God, not man, “As long as some little **drop** of righteousness survives in our works, we have something to boast about. So, if faith excludes all boasting, the righteousness of faith can in no way coexist with the righteousness of works.” Calvin, *Institutes*, (Banner of Truth), 353.

³² Edwards, “Justification by Faith Alone”, *Works*, vol. II, 625.

³³ Owen, *Works*, vol V, 209.

APPLICATION

Gospel Doctrine Produces Gospel **living**.

Justification by Faith produces gospel **humility**.

The gospel strips us of our **pride**, so God can lift us up in humility.

Prov. 16:18, 1 Pet. 5:5-7, Isa. 57:15

The gospel gives us freedom to be **honest** with ourselves.

Justification by Faith produces gospel **confidence**.

Faith, no matter how small, justifies **fully** and finally.

1 John 1:9

God began a work in you by faith, he will **complete** it by faith, Phil. 1:6

God may discipline, but there is no **condemnation** for you if you are in Christ, Rom. 8:1.

Justification by Faith produces gospel **gratitude**.

Merit produces **boasting**, grace produces **gratitude**, Ps. 50:23.

Justification by Faith produces gospel **works**.

Ps. 130:3-4, “with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.” Titus 2:11-12, Rom. 3:31.

Charles Spurgeon “We are not under the law as the **method** of salvation, but we delight to see the law in the hand of Christ, and desire to **obey** the Lord in all things.”³⁴

Justification by Faith produces gospel **sonship**.

There is no more penalty for you, and no further law to fulfill, all has been **done**. You have been adopted fully and finally. Romans 8:14-15; Galatians 4:4-7.

Justification by Faith produces gospel **mercy**.

Matt. 5:7; 6:12

It is hard to give **undeserved** mercy when I think that I **deserve** mercy.

Ps. 103:14

A **difficulty** giving mercy is a sure sign that we are living in a **merit** framework.

Those who live by mercy have mercy to give.

Justification by Faith produces gospel **mission**.

The gospel means that anyone can be saved. No one is **far away** from faith. No one is **beyond** reaching. 1 Tim. 1:15-16, Rom. 10:8-9.

Justification by Faith produces gospel **worship**.

Justification is the beginning of **experiential** knowledge of God. Isaiah 6:5-7.

A.W. Tozer said, “what comes into our minds when we think about **God** is the most **important** thing about us.”



Visit gabcameras.org/attributes or scan the QR code to sign up for notifications and updates about the next One-Day Seminar: *The Nature and Attributes of God*, Saturday, September 13th, 2025.

³⁴ Spurgeon, “The Perpetuity of the Law of God”, in *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. XXVIII, 277.