

CHAPTER 11

OF JUSTIFICATION

Definition of justification

“1. 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 any thing 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 receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.”

The word *justification* comes from the word *just*, or *justice*. It means to declare righteous, holy—“not guilty.” Therefore, it is possible for men to “justify God” (Ps 51:4; Luke 7:29). But normally the word refers to sinners, whom God justifies, declares holy, through Christ (Rom 3:19-28).

God can declare us righteous because Jesus Christ has carried our penalty. God does not declare us righteous because of anything we do or anything he does in us. This section explains what justification is not in three phrases:

- Not by infusing righteousness into them
 - We are not justified because we are now made more holy than we were before, but because God has forgiven our sins.
- Not for any thing wrought in them or done by them
 - Even our faith is not the ground of our justification; rather, Christ’s blood is the only ground of our justification.
- Not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness
 - The only good thing that allows us to be justified is the righteousness and faithfulness of Christ.

We receive this gift of justification through faith alone—and even our faith is a gift of God (Eph 2:8).

The place of faith in justification

The next two sections explain how our faith brings us justification, and how we receive our faith.

Faith is the only instrument

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

There is only one way to be justified, and that is through faith (Gal 2:16). We must believe in Christ and receive him to be saved. Yet this faith in itself is not what saves us; it is only the act of receiving Christ—he saves us through his sacrifice for us.

Faith is the only means of receiving Christ and salvation. Other good works avail nothing (Rom 3:28).

But true faith is never found alone. It is just one of the saving graces God gives his elect. He also give his elect sanctification and perseverance. Any other “faith” is dead (Jas 2:14-26). True faith always has fruit in the Christian life.

Our justification purchased by Christ

“3. 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 any thing 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.”

Our whole salvation, from beginning to end, was purchased by Christ. We have done absolutely nothing to deserve salvation. Even our faith is part of the gift of God to us. Since Christ purchased all these things with his own obedience and blood, both the justice and the grace of God come to full light in our salvation (Rom 3:26; Eph 1:7, 12). Christ died in our place; he saved us and now we are his eternal glory and reward (Rom 5:8-10; Isa 53:4-6, 10-12).

The application of justification

The next three sections describe the manner in which God gives justification to us.

Time of justification

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

Although we are elected from before the foundation of the world, we are not actually justified until we receive Christ as our Savior. The order is as follows (often called the *Ordo Salutis*,” the “order of salvation”):

1. Elected
2. Redeemed by Christ’s death
3. Regenerated (effectually called)
4. [We now have faith]
5. Justified and adopted
6. Sanctified
7. Glorified

Steps 3-5 normally happen at the same time. But we cannot be justified until the Holy Spirit works in our heart, giving us faith (Col 1:21; Titus 3:3-7).

Scope of justification

“5. God doth 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.”

Justification includes not only sins committed before being saved (Isa 1:18), but all sins committed after being saved (1 John 1:7-9; 2:1-2).

When Christians sin, they often are chastened by God on the earth in various ways (Ps 32:3-5; 51:7-12; 89:30-34; Prov 3:11-12; 1 Cor 11:30-32; Heb 12:9-11). Christians should remember that each of us will give to God an account of our Christian lives at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10).

Recipients of justification

“6. 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.”

People in all ages of the world's history are the same, and need to be saved the same way. We all are justified through faith in God's Messiah, promised in his covenant (Rom 4:1-8; Gal 3:6-9, 22).

Remember that the famous verse used by Martin Luther in the Protestant Reformation, "The just shall live by faith" (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38), comes from the Old Testament, Hab 2:4.