

The Doctrine of Justification

According to Reformation Era Confessions and Catechisms

“Justification is the hinge on which all true religion turns.”

John Calvin

Heidelberg Disputation

Martin Luther, 1518

Theses 24 and 25

He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ. For the righteousness of God is not acquired by means of acts frequently repeated, as Aristotle taught, but it is imparted by faith, for He who through faith is righteous shall live and Man believes with his heart and so is justified. Therefore I wish to have the words without work understood in the following manner: Not that the righteous person does nothing, but that his works do not make him righteous, rather that his righteousness creates works. For grace and faith are infused without our works. After they have been imparted the works follow. Thus Rom. 3:20 states, No human being will be justified in His sight by works of the law, and, For we hold that man is justified by faith apart from works of law (Rom. 3:28). In other words, works contribute nothing to justification. Therefore man knows that works which he does by such faith are not his but God's. For this reason he does not seek to become justified or glorified through them, but seeks God. His justification by faith in Christ is sufficient to him. Christ is his wisdom, righteousness, etc., as 1 Cor 1:30 has it, that he himself may be Christ's vessel and instrument (*operatio seu instrumentum*).

The law says, do this, and it is never done. Grace says, believe in this, and everything is already done. The first part is clear from what has been stated by the Apostle and his interpreter, St. Augustine, in many places. And it has been stated often enough above that the law works wrath and keeps all men under the curse. The second part is clear from the same sources, for faith justifies. And the law (says St. Augustine) commands what faith obtains. For through faith Christ is in us, indeed, one with us. Christ is just and has fulfilled all the commands of God, wherefore we also fulfill everything through him since he was made ours through faith.

67 Articles

Huldrych Zwingli, 1523

Article 15

“For in the faith rests our salvation, and in unbelief our damnation;
for all truth is clear in him.”

Augsburg Confession

Phillip Melanchthon, 1530

Article 4

- (1) Also they teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for

- (2) Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins.

- (3) This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight

Smalcald Articles

Martin Luther, 1537

Article 2

The first and chief article is this,

That Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins,
and was raised again for our justification, Rom. 4, 25.

And He alone is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world, John 1, 29;
and God has laid upon Him the iniquities of us all, Is. 53, 6.

Likewise: All have sinned and are justified without merit

[freely, and without their own works or merits] by His grace,
through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, in His blood, Rom. 3, 23 f.

Now, since it is necessary to believe this,

and it cannot be otherwise acquired or apprehended by any work, law, or merit,
it is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us as St. Paul says, Rom. 3, 28:

For we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law.

Likewise v. 26: That He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Christ.

Of this article nothing can be yielded or surrendered

[nor can anything be granted or permitted contrary to the same],

even though heaven and earth, and whatever will not abide, should sink to ruin.

For there is none other name under heaven, given among men whereby we must be saved,
says Peter, Acts 4, 12. And with His stripes we are healed, Is. 53, 5.

And upon this article all things depend which we teach and practice
in opposition to the Pope, the devil, and the [whole] world.

Therefore, we must be sure concerning this doctrine, and not doubt;

for otherwise all is lost, and the Pope and devil and all things gain the victory and suit over us.

Article 8.1

“What I have hitherto and constantly taught concerning this I know not how to change in the least, namely, that by faith, as St. Peter says, we acquire a new and clean heart, and God will and does account us entirely righteous and holy for the sake of Christ, our Mediator. And although sin in the flesh has not yet been altogether removed or become dead, yet He will not punish or remember it.”

The French Confession

John Calvin, François de Morel, 1559

Article 18

We believe that all our justification rests upon the remission of our sins, in which also is our only blessedness, as saith the Psalmist (Psa. Xxxii. 2). We therefore reject all other means of justification before God, and without claiming any virtue or merit, we rest simply in the obedience of Jesus Christ, which is imputed to us as much to blot out all our sins as to make us find grace and favor in the sight of God. And, in fact, we believe that in falling away from this foundation, however slightly, we could not find rest elsewhere, but should always be troubled. Forasmuch as we are never at peace with God till we resolve to be loved in Jesus Christ, for of ourselves we are worthy of hatred.

Article 20

We believe that we are made partakers of this justification by faith alone, as it is written: ‘He suffered for our salvation, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish.’ And this is done inasmuch as we appropriate to our use the promises of life which are given to us through him, and feel their effect when we accept them, being assured that we are established by the Word of God and shall not be deceived. Thus our justification through faith depends upon the free promises by which God declares and testifies his love to us.

Article 22

We believe that by this faith we are regenerated in newness of life, being by nature subject to sin. Now we receive by faith grace to live holily and in the fear of God, in accepting the promise which is given to us by the Gospel, namely: that God will give us his Holy Spirit. This faith not only doth not hinder us from holy living, or turn us from the love of righteousness, but of necessity begetteth in us all good works. Moreover, although God worketh in us for our salvation, and reneweth our hearts, determining us to that which is good, yet we confess that the good works which we do proceed from his Spirit, and can not be accounted to us for justification, neither do they entitle us to the adoption of sons, for we should always be doubting and restless in our hearts, if we did not rest upon the atonement by which Jesus Christ hath acquitted us.

Calvin's Catechism

John Calvin, 1560

Questions 114-127

114. What good comes to us from this faith, when we have it?
It justifies us before God, and makes us obtain eternal life.
115. How so? Is not man justified by good works in a holy life and in conformity to God?
If any one be found so perfect, he might well be deemed righteous, but since we are all poor sinners, we must look elsewhere for a worthiness in which to make answer before the judgment of God.
116. But are all our works so reprobate that they cannot merit grace before God.
First, all that we do of ourselves, by our own nature, is vicious, and therefore cannot please God. He condemns them all.
117. You say then that before God has received us in His grace, we can nothing but sin, just as a bad tree cannot but produce bad fruit?
It is so. For even if our works appear beautiful outwardly, yet they are evil, since the heart, to which God looks, is perverted.
118. Hence you conclude, that we cannot by our merits anticipate God, and so induce Him to be kind to us, but on the contrary that we do nothing but provoke Him to be against us?
Yes. And therefore I say: merely through His goodness, without any regard to our works, He is pleased to accept us freely in Jesus Christ, imputing His righteousness to us, and does not impute our sins to us.
119. What do you mean then by saying that a man is justified by faith?
That in believing the promises of the gospel and in receiving them in true affiance of the heart, we enter into this righteousness.
120. You mean then that as God offers righteousness to us by the gospel, so it is by faith that we receive it?
Yes.
121. But after God has once received us, are the works which we do by His grace, not pleasing to Him?
Yes, they are, in that He generously accepts them, not however in virtue of their own worthiness.
122. How is that? Are they not accepted as worthy, seeing that they proceed from the Holy Spirit?
No. For there is always some weakness in them, the weakness of our flesh, through which they are defiled.
123. By what means, the, are they made acceptable?
It is by faith. That is to say, that a person is assured in his conscience that God will not examine him harshly, but covering his defects and impurities by the purity of Jesus Christ, He will regard him as perfect.
124. But can we say from this that a Christian man is justified by works after God has called him, or that through them he merits the love of God, and so obtains eternal life?
No. On the contrary, it is said that no man living will be justified in His sight
Therefore we have to pray that He will not enter into judgment with us, nor call us to account.
125. You do not mean therefore that the good works of believers are useless?

No. For God promises to reward them fully, both in this world and in Paradise. But this comes from His gratuitous love toward us: moreover He buries all our faults, so as never to remember them.

126. But can we believe that we are justified, without doing good works?

That is impossible. For to believe in Jesus Christ is to receive Him as He has given Himself to us. He promises not only to deliver us from death and restore us to favour with God His Father, through the merit of His innocence, but also to regenerate us by His Spirit, that we may be enabled to live in holiness.

127. Faith, then, not only does not make us careless of good works, but is the root from which they are produced.

It is so, and for this reason, the doctrine of the Gospel is comprehended in these two points, faith and repentance.

The Scottish Confession

John Knox, 1560

Chapter 15: The Perfection of the Law and the Imperfection of Man

We confess and acknowledge that the law of God is most just, equal, holy, and perfect, commanding those things which, when perfectly done, can give life and bring man to eternal felicity. But our nature is so corrupt, weak, and imperfect, that we are never able perfectly to fulfill the works of the law. Even after we are reborn, if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth of God is not in us. It is therefore essential for us to lay hold on Christ Jesus, in his righteousness and his atonement, since he is the end and consummation of the Law and since it is by him that we are set at liberty so that the curse of God may not fall upon us, even though we do not fulfill the Law in all points. For as God the Father beholds us in the body of his Son Christ Jesus, he accepts our imperfect obedience as if it were perfect, and covers our works, which are defiled with many stains, with the justice of his Son.

The Belgic Confession

Guido de Bres, 1561

Article 22: The Righteousness of Faith

We believe that
for us to acquire the true knowledge of this great mystery
the Holy Spirit kindles in our hearts a true faith
that embraces Jesus Christ,

with all his merits,

and makes him its own,
and no longer looks for anything

apart from him.

For it must necessarily follow
that either all that is required for our salvation
is not in Christ or,
if all is in him,
then those who have Christ by faith
have his salvation entirely.

Therefore,
to say that Christ is not enough
but that something else is needed as well
is a most enormous blasphemy against God—

for it then would follow
that Jesus Christ is only half a Savior.

And therefore we justly say with Paul
that we are justified “by faith alone”
or “by faith apart from works.”⁵⁴

However,
we do not mean,
properly speaking,
that it is faith itself that justifies us—

for faith is only the instrument
by which we embrace Christ,
our righteousness.

But Jesus Christ is our righteousness

in making available to us all his merits
and all the holy works he has done
for us and in our place.

And faith is the instrument

that keeps us in communion with him
and with all his benefits.

When those benefits are made ours,
they are more than enough to absolve us
of our sins.

Article 23: The Justification of Sinners

We believe
that our blessedness lies in the forgiveness of our sins
because of Jesus Christ,
and that in it our righteousness before God is contained,

as David and Paul teach us
when they declare those people blessed
to whom God grants righteousness
apart from works.

And the same apostle says
that we are “justified by his grace as a gift,
through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”
And therefore we cling to this foundation,
which is firm forever,

giving all glory to God,
humbling ourselves,
and recognizing ourselves as we are;
not claiming a thing for ourselves or our merits
and leaning and resting

on the sole obedience of Christ crucified,

which is ours when we believe in him.

That is enough to cover all our sins
and to make us confident,
freeing the conscience from the fear, dread, and terror of God’s approach,

without doing what our first parents, Adam and Eve, did,
who trembled as they tried to cover themselves with fig leaves.

In fact, if we had to appear before God relying—no matter how little—
on ourselves or some other creature,
then, alas, we would be swallowed up.

Therefore everyone must say with David:
“[Lord,] do not enter into judgment with your servant,
for no one living is righteous before you.”

2nd Helvetic Confession

Heinrich Bullinger, Martin Bucer, Leo Jud, 1561

Chapter 15: Of the True Justification of the Faithful

WHAT IS JUSTIFICATION? According to the apostle in his treatment of justification, to justify means to remit sins, to absolve from guilt and punishment, to receive into favor, and to pronounce a man just. For in his epistle to the Romans the apostle says: "It is God who justifies; who is to condemn?" (Rom. 8:33). To justify and to condemn are opposed. And in The Acts of the Apostles the apostle states: "Through Christ forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38 f.). For in the Law and also in the Prophets we read: "If there is a dispute between men, and they come into court...the judges decide between them, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty" (Deut. 25:1). And in Isa., ch. 5: "Woe to those...who acquit the guilty for a bribe."

WE ARE JUSTIFIED ON ACCOUNT OF CHRIST. Now it is most certain that all of us are by nature sinners and godless, and before God's judgment-seat are convicted of godlessness and are guilty of death, but that, solely by the grace of Christ and not from any merit of ours or consideration for us, we are justified, that is, absolved from sin and death by God the Judge. For what is clearer than what Paul said: "Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:23 f.).

IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS. For Christ took upon himself and bore the sins of the world, and satisfied divine justice. Therefore, solely on account of Christ's sufferings and resurrection God is propitious with respect to our sins and does not impute them to us, but imputes Christ's righteousness to us as our own (II Cor. 5:19 ff.; Rom. 4:25), so that now we are not only cleansed and purged from sins or are holy, but also, granted the righteousness of Christ, and so absolved from sin, death and condemnation, are at last righteous and heirs of eternal life. Properly speaking, therefore, God alone justifies us, and justifies only on account of Christ, not imputing sins to us but imputing his righteousness to us.

WE ARE JUSTIFIED BY FAITH ALONE. But because we receive this justification, not through any works, but through faith in the mercy of God and in Christ, we therefore teach and believe with the apostle that sinful man is justified by faith alone in Christ, not by the law or any works. For the apostle says: "We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (Rom. 3:28). Also: "If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness....And to one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness" (Rom. 4:2 ff.; Gen. 15:6). And again: "By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God--not because of works, lest any man should boast," etc. (Eph. 2:8 f.). Therefore, because faith receives Christ our righteousness and attributes everything to the grace of God in Christ, on that account justification is attributed to faith, chiefly because of Christ and not therefore because it is our work. For it is the gift of God.

WE RECEIVE CHRIST BY FAITH. Moreover, the Lord abundantly shows that we receive Christ by faith, in John, ch. 6, where he puts eating for believing, and believing for eating. For as we receive food by eating, so we participate in Christ by believing.

JUSTIFICATION IS NOT ATTRIBUTED PARTLY TO CHRIST OR TO FAITH, PARTLY TO US. Therefore, we do not share in the benefit of justification partly because of the grace of God or Christ, and partly because of ourselves, our love, works or merit, but we attribute it wholly to the grace of God in Christ through faith. For our love and our works could not please God in Christ through faith. For our love and our works could not please God if performed by unrighteous men. Therefore, it is necessary for us to be righteous before we may love and do good works. We are made truly righteous, as we have said, by faith in Christ purely by the grace of God, who does not impute to us our sins, but the righteousness of Christ, or rather, he imputes faith in Christ to us for righteousness. Moreover, the apostle very clearly derives love from faith when he says: "The aim of our command is love that issues from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith" (I Tim. 1:5)

JAMES COMPARED WITH PAUL. Wherefore, in this matter we are not speaking of a fictitious, empty, lazy and dead faith, but of a living, quickening faith. It is and is called a living faith because it apprehends Christ who is life and makes alive, and shows that it is alive by living works. And so James does not contradict anything in this doctrine of ours. For he speaks of an empty, dead faith of which some boasted but who did not have Christ living in them by faith (James 2:14 ff.). James said that works justify, yet without contradicting the apostle (otherwise he would have to be rejected) but showing that Abraham proved his living and justifying faith by works. This all the pious do, but they trust in Christ alone and not in their own works. For again the apostle said: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, [The Latin reads: "by the faith of the Son of God."] who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not reject the grace of God; for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose," etc. (Gal. 2:20 f.).

Heidelberg Catechism

Zacharius Ursinus, Caspar Olevianus, 1563

Question and Answer 21

Q. What is true faith?

A. True faith is not only a sure knowledge by which I hold as true all that God revealed to us in Scripture; it is also a wholehearted trust, which the Holy Spirit creates in me by the gospel, that God has freely granted, not only to others but to me also, forgiveness of sins, eternal righteousness, and salvation. These are gifts of sheer grace, granted solely by Christ's merit.

Question and Answer 56

Q. What do you believe concerning "the forgiveness of sins"?

A. I believe that God because of Christ's satisfaction will no longer remember any of my sins, or my sinful nature, which I need to struggle against all my life. Rather, by grace God grants me the righteousness of Christ to free me forever from judgment.

Question and Answer 59

Q. What good does it do you however, to believe all this?

A. In Christ I am righteous before God and heir to life everlasting.

Question and Answer 60

Q. How are you righteous before God?

A. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments, of never having kept any of them, and of still being inclined to all evil, nevertheless, without any merit of my own, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, and as if I been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me. All I need to do is accept this gift with a believing heart.

Question and Answers 61

Q. Why do you say that through faith alone you are righteous?

A. Not because I please God by the worthiness of my faith. It is because only Christ's satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness make me righteous before God, and because I can accept this righteousness and make it mine in no other way than through faith.

Question and Answers 62

Q. Why can't our good works be our righteousness before God, or at least part of our righteousness?

A. Because the righteousness which can pass God's judgment must be entirely perfect and must in every way measure up to the divine law. But even our best works in this life are imperfect and stained with sin.

39 Articles of Religion

Thomas Cromwell, 1571

Of the Justification of Man

We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only, is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification.

The Irish Articles of Religion

James Ussher, 1615

Of Justification and Faith

34. We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, applied by faith; and not for our own works or merits. And this righteousness, which we so receive of God's mercy and Christ's merits, embraced by faith, is taken, accepted, and allowed of God for our perfect and full justification.

35. Although this justification be free unto us, yet it cometh not so freely unto us that there is no ransom paid therefore at all. God showed his great mercy in delivering us from our former captivity, without requiring of any ransom to be paid, or amends to be made on our parts; which thing by us had been impossible to be done. And whereas all the world was not able of themselves to pay any part towards their ransom, it pleased our heavenly Father of his infinite mercy without any desert of ours, to provide for us the most precious merits of his own Son, whereby our ransom might be fully paid, the law fulfilled, and his justice fully satisfied. So that Christ is now the righteousness of all them that truly believe in him. He for them paid their ransom by his death. He for them fulfilled the law in his life. That now in him, and by him every true Christian man may be called a fulfiller of the law: forasmuch as that which our infirmity was not able to effect, Christ's justice hath performed. And thus the justice and mercy of God do embrace each other: the grace of God not shutting out the justice of God in the matter of our justification; but only shutting out the justice of man (that is to say, the justice of our own works) from being any cause of deserving our justification.

36. When we say that we are justified by faith only, we do not mean that the said justifying faith is alone in man, without true Repentance, Hope, Charity, and the fear of God (for such a faith is dead, and cannot justify), neither do we mean that this our act to believe in Christ, nor this our faith in Christ, which is within us, doth of itself justify us, nor deserve our justification unto us (for that were to account ourselves to be justified by the virtue or dignity of some thing that is within ourselves): but the true understanding and meaning thereof is that although we have Faith, Hope, Charitie, Repentance, and the fear of God within us and add never so many good works thereunto: yet we must renounce the merit of all our said virtues, of Faith, Hope, Charitie, and all our other virtues, and good deeds, which we either have done, shall do, or can do, as

things that be far too weak and imperfect, and insufficient to deserve remission of our sins, and our justification: and therefore we must trust only in God's mercy, and the merits of his most dearly beloved Son, our only Redeemer, Saviour, and Justifier, Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, because Faith doth directly send us to Christ for our justification, and that by faith given us of God we embrace the promise of God's mercy, and the remission of our sin (which thing none other of our virtues or works properly doth): therefore the Scripture saith, that Faith without works; and the ancient fathers of the Church to the same purpose, that only Faith doth justify us.

37. By justifying Faith we understand not only the common belief of the Articles of Christian Religion, and a persuasion of the truth of God's word in general: but also a particular application of the gratuitous promises of the Gospel, to the comfort of our own souls: whereby we lay hold on Christ with all his benefits, having an earnest trust and confidence in God that he will be merciful unto us for his only Son's sake. So that a true believer may be certain, by the assurance of faith, of the forgiveness of his sins, and of his everlasting salvation by Christ.

38. A true, lively, justifying faith, and the sanctifying Spirit of God is not extinguished nor vanisheth away in the regenerate, either finally or totally.

Westminster Confession of Faith

Westminster Divines, 1647

Chapter 11: 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 anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor 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.

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.

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 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.

4. 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 doth, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them.

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.

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.

Chapter 14: Of Saving Faith

1. The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word, by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened.

2. By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God himself speaking therein; and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.

3. This faith is different in degrees, weak or strong; may be often and many ways assailed, and weakened, but gets the victory: growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance, through Christ, who is both the author and finisher of our faith.

Westminster Larger Catechism

Westminster Divines, 1647

Q. 70. What is justification?

A. Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardoneth all their sins, accepteth and accounteth their persons righteous in his sight; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone.

Q. 71. How is justification an act of God's free grace?

A. Although Christ, by his obedience and death, did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice in the behalf of them that are justified; yet inasmuch as God accepteth the satisfaction from a surety, which he might have demanded of them, and did provide this surety, his own only Son, imputing his righteousness to them, and requiring nothing of them for their justification but faith, which also is his gift, their justification is to them of free grace.

Q. 72. *What is justifying faith?*

A. Justifying faith is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and Word of God, whereby he, being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition, not only assenteth to the truth of the promise of the gospel, but receiveth and resteth upon Christ and his righteousness, therein held forth, for pardon of sin, and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation.

Q. 73. *How doth faith justify a sinner in the sight of God?*

A. Faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of those other graces which do always accompany it, or of good works that are the fruits of it, nor as if the grace of faith, or any act thereof, were imputed to him for his justification; but only as it is an instrument by which he receiveth and applieth Christ and his righteousness.

Q. 77. *Wherein do justification and sanctification differ?*

A. Although sanctification be inseparably joined with justification, yet they differ, in that God in justification imputeth the righteousness of Christ; in sanctification his Spirit infuseth grace, and enableth to the exercise thereof; in the former, sin is pardoned; in the other, it is subdued: the one doth equally free all believers from the revenging wrath of God, and that perfectly in this life, that they never fall into condemnation; the other is neither equal in all, nor in this life perfect in any, but growing up to perfection.

Westminster Shorter Catechism

Westminster Divines, 1647

Q. 33. *What is justification?*

A. Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

Q. 85. *What doth God require of us that we may escape his wrath and curse due to us for sin?*

A. To escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin, God requireth of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, with the diligent use of all the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption.

Q. 86. *What is faith in Jesus Christ?*

A. Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel.

Collected and Organized by

Benjamin R. Lee

Assistant Pastor

Oakwood PCA, State College, PA

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