

LC 70 What is justification? 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 any thing 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.

LC 71 How is justification an act of God's free grace? 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 in as much 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.

LC 72 What is justifying faith? 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.

LC 73 How doth faith justify a sinner in the sight of God? 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.¹

INTRODUCTION TO SHEPHERD ON JUSTIFICATION ~ CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON SOLA FIDE

1. "Justification by faith alone' as a way of summarizing the biblical doctrine of justification runs into difficulty, however, when we come to the letter of James in the New Testament. James summarizes the gospel by saying that 'a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone' (Jas. 2:24)... In a letter to the editor in the September 2007 issue of Christianity Today, the writer confesses that he has come to question the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone. He says, 'The case for justification by faith alone only seems to work if certain Scripture passages are excluded. For example, I've never heard preachers talk about this topic and voluntarily bring in James 2:14-26. They seem to consciously avoid James' teaching.' This writer has a point." [TWOR, 19-20]
2. "Sometimes we represent the difference between justification by faith and justification by works as the difference between justification by believing (faith alone, faith without works) and justification by doing (works alone, faith without works, or even works in addition to faith). This is not what Paul has in view when he contrasts justification by faith with justification by works." [TCOG, 71]
3. "Is there any hope for a common understanding between Roman Catholicism and evangelical Protestantism regarding the way of salvation? May I suggest that there is at least a glimmer of hope if both sides are willing to embrace a covenantal understanding of the way of salvation." [TCOG, 59]

I. JUSTIFYING FAITH INCLUDES FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE AS PART OF ITS ESSENTIAL DEFINITION.

- A. "Repentance and obedience flow from faith as the fullness of faith. This is faithfulness, and faithfulness is perseverance in faith." [TCOG, 50]
- B. "[James 2:21] says that Abraham was 'considered righteous' for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. Literally the verse says that Abraham was justified by works... His faith was not merely demonstrated by what he did, but was completed by what he did. Without the deed, the faith would not be genuine faith... His faith is the obedience of faith." [TCOG, 29]"
- C. "The obedience required of Israel is not the obedience of merit, but the obedience of faith. It is the fullness of faith. Obedience is simply faithfulness to the Lord; it is the righteousness of faith (compare Rom. 9:32)." [TCOG, 39]

II. THE ROLE OF FAITH IN JUSTIFICATION IS TO FULFILL THE NECESSARY CONDITION OF FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE.

- A. "Salvation is both by grace and through faith. These are the two parts of the covenant: grace and faith, promise and obligation." [TCOG, 63]
- B. "Eternal life is promised as an undeserved gift from the Lord. He forgives our sins and receives us as righteous because of Jesus Christ and his redemptive accomplishment on our behalf. At the same time, faith, repentance, obedience, and perseverance are indispensable to the enjoyment of these blessings. They are conditions, but they are not meritorious conditions." [TCOG, 50]
- C. "The point in all of this is that Jesus makes justification contingent upon obedience. The Lord God justifies the righteous and condemns the wicked... Jesus justifies the sinner who confesses his sin and repents of it. The good news of the gospel is not that Jesus forgives sinners who persevere in their ungodliness, but that he forgives sinners who repent." [TWOR, 61]

¹ Cf. Romans 3:19-28; 4:1-8; 5:18-21

- D. "It has become apparent by now that in the proclamation of the gospel, our Lord makes justification and salvation contingent upon obedience." [TWOR, 59]
- E. "Jesus, Paul, and James all make justification and salvation contingent upon a penitent and obedient faith." [TWOR, 63]
- F. "Genesis 15:6 says that Abraham's faith was so significant that it was credited to him as righteousness! If so, then righteousness was a condition to be met, and faith met that condition." [TCOG, 15]
- G. "...but of course the work of offering Isaac as a sacrifice did not happen until much later in the experience of Abraham. In the light of Genesis 15:6 it would be wrong to conclude that Abraham's faith was not credited to him until after it had been completed by the offering of Isaac. The point is that the faith Abraham had when he believed the promise was the kind of faith that would issue in obedience." [TCOG, 30]

III. THE JUSTIFYING RIGHTEOUSNESS IMPUTED TO THE SINNER INCLUDES HIS OWN PERSONAL OBEDIENT FAITH.

- A. "Genesis 15:6 says that Abraham's faith was so significant that it was credited to him as righteousness! If so, then righteousness was a condition to be met, and faith met that condition... For that reason, [James] can also say in [chapter 2] verse 24 that "a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone." The faith credited to Abraham as righteousness was a living and active faith." [TCOG, 15-16]
- B. "What is credited or imputed to Abraham? The answer is his faith. The faith he had was reckoned to his account as righteousness. Faith and the obedience flowing from faith are of a piece with one another and together they constitute the righteousness of Abraham. Abraham was a righteous man. He trusted the Lord and obeyed him. This fact is recognized, acknowledged, and declared in the judgment of God. This is the man who is justified and saved... James makes the application to his own generation and to every generation of believers by saying in verse 24 that a person is justified by what he does, and not by faith alone." [TWOR, 30]
- C. "The righteous who live by faith... look to Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins, and they walk with the Lord day by day in repentance and obedience. This is the kind of faith that is imputed to Abraham for righteousness. This is the faith by which we are justified today according to Romans 3:28." [TWOR, 40]

IV. JUST AS OUR LORD'S OWN OBEDIENT FAITH WAS IMPUTED TO JESUS FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS, SO THE SINNER'S OWN OBEDIENT FAITH IS IMPUTED TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

- A. "All of this is made possible through the covenantal righteousness of Jesus Christ. His was a living, active, and obedient faith that took him all the way to the cross. This faith was credited to him as righteousness... But just as Jesus was faithful in order to guarantee the blessing, so his followers must be faithful in order to inherit the blessing." [TCOG, 19]
- B. "Abraham had to keep covenant with the Lord, as did his descendants to whom the promises were also made. The preeminent covenant keeper is Jesus Christ. He is the seed of Abraham, "obedient to death — even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8). As the covenant is kept, according to the pattern of Jesus Christ, the promises of the covenant are fulfilled." [TCOG, 75]

V. THE REAL PROBLEM WITH THE JEWISH PHARISEES WHO SOUGHT TO BE JUSTIFIED BY WORKS IS THAT, IN CONTRAST TO OBEDIENT BELIEVERS, THEIR FAITH WAS NOT OBEDIENT ENOUGH — THAT IS, THEY WERE TOO DISOBEDIENT AND SINFUL — TO MEET GOD'S REQUIREMENT FOR JUSTIFICATION.

- "This living, active, and obedient faith is clearly differentiated from works of the law. In the language of Romans 2, those who are seeking to be justified and saved by the works of the law do not keep the law. They only hear the law but do not do what it says. In contrast to that, Paul describes true believers as those who repent of sin and who seek to do what is good according to God's law... Those who believe in Jesus with this kind of faith will be justified... The believer, who believes in Jesus Christ with a living, active, penitent, and obedient faith, is the righteous man who lives by faith (Rom. 1:17)." [TCOG, 40]

VI. THE SINNER'S JUSTIFICATION OCCURS DEFINITELY AT THE FINAL JUDGMENT, FOLLOWING AN EVALUATION OF HIS PERSONAL WORKS AS A NECESSARY CONDITION, NOT AT THE MOMENT OF CONVERSION WHEN HE EXERCISES JUSTIFYING FAITH IN THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST.

- A. "To summarize, the justification in view in James 2:24 is soteric [salvific, saving] justification... It contemplates a Day of Judgment to come when all people will appear before the Lord Jesus Christ to be judged. Will they escape from a judgment

that is unto condemnation and death? James says in verse 24 that they will be justified and saved by what they do and not by faith alone.” [TCOG, 26]²

- B. “The thought is not simply that righteous people show themselves to be truly righteous people by the help they give to those in need. Jesus is saying in Matthew 25 that only the righteous — those whose faith is wrought out in deeds — enter into eternal life.” [TCOG, 28]
- C. “When are we justified? Theologians have offered a variety of answers to this question. Some say we are justified in the eternal decree of God, and that this decree is simply worked out in the course of history. Others say that we were justified when Jesus died on the cross and rose again from the dead on the third day. That is when our sins were atoned for, and so we were justified when Jesus was justified as our sin bearer in his death and resurrection. Still others say that we are justified at the moment when we are baptized, or at the moment when we come to personal faith in Jesus. Then the justification that is prepared for us is made ours and we are actually and personally justified. And then there are those who say that we are justified really only in the final judgment. There is a measure of truth in all of these views, but the key to understanding the biblical doctrine lies in the last view mentioned. We will be justified on the day when we appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and when each one will receive what is due him for the things done in the body, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10). Justification is a forensic act, that is, an act of judgment. The final judgment is by pre-eminence the time when God acts forensically in judgment, the time when God renders a verdict that will never be appealed or reversed.” [TWOR, 86]
- D. “A common understanding is that at the moment the sinner believes, God declares his justification in the courtroom of heaven. That is, God declares our justification in secret. This is when we are really justified — at the moment when we are converted. On the Day of Judgment God will simply announce openly and before a gathered humanity that once-for-all secret declaration. The judgment of the last day is therefore nothing more than a public announcement of a judgment that has taken place at another time and in another place and in total secrecy... The point to be made here is that the Bible knows nothing about a secret assize like the one just described. There is no secret courtroom where the sinner is not present to be judged, where he does not see the judge, and where neither he nor anyone else can hear this momentous ultimate judgment being pronounced. The Bible knows nothing of such a secret judgment. This secret judgment is a theological invention.” [TWOR, 89-90]
- E. “The exclusive ground of the justification of the believer in the state of justification is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, but his obedience... is necessary to his continuing in a state of justification (Thesis 21).” [TCJC, 34]
- F. “The righteousness of Jesus Christ ever remains the exclusive ground of the believer’s justification, but the personal godliness of the believer is also necessary for his justification in the judgment of the last day (Thesis 22).” [TCJC, 35]

VII. ONLY THE ‘PASSIVE OBEDIENCE’ OF CHRIST’S SUFFERING AT CALVARY IS IMPUTED IN JUSTIFICATION, NOT HIS ENTIRE LIFE OF ACTIVE OBEDIENCE.

- A. “Now how did Christ perform this legal righteousness for us? Did he do it by fulfilling the law during the whole course of his life (what theologians ordinarily refer to as his *active obedience*)? Or did he do it by submitting to punishment prescribed in the law for transgressions of the law (what theologians ordinarily refer to as *passive obedience*)?... The righteousness Christ wrought out for us was not the fulfillment of the demands of the law during the whole course of his life but rather his death and resurrection to pay the penalty for sin. In other words, the righteousness of Christ imputed to us for our justification is not his active obedience, but his passive obedience.” [BOTB, 105]
- B. “We do not find a belief in the imputation of active obedience in Calvin, Ursinus, or the Heidelberg Catechism for the reason that their understanding of justification as the remission of sins did not require it and they did not find it in the Bible... Early Reformed theology had no doctrine of the imputation of active obedience... Even the Westminster Confession as late as 1647 was written as a compromise document to accommodate the views of three prominent members of the Westminster Assembly... who did not subscribe to the imputation of active obedience.” [BOTB, 115]

² **Jm. 2:14** “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? **15** If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, **16** and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? **17** Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. **18** But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. **19** You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! **20** But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? **21** Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? **22** Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? **23** And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS ACCOUNTED TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.’ And he was called the friend of God. **24** You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. **25** Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? **26** For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. **Rm. 3:4** Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: ‘THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND MAY OVERCOME WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED.’”