

# Just-As-If-I'd-Never-Sinned

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Q. What is justification?

A. Justification is the act of God's free grace by which He pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight. He does so only because He counts the righteousness of Christ as ours.

Justification is received by faith alone.

(Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A #33)

*"knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ"*

(Galatians 2:16)

In our last devotional, I introduced us to three of the most important words in the Bible that we hardly ever use. These words are: justification, spiritual adoption and sanctification. Today we will be taking a look at the first of those three words: JUSTIFICATION.

What is the doctrine of justification? What does it mean to be justified, and what does it have to do with your life as a Christian? If you've ever read through the New Testament, you are well aware that the word "*justification*" or "*justified*" pops up all over the place, especially in the writings of the Apostle Paul. In fact, the words "*justification*" or "*justified*" occur almost 50 times in the New Testament letters. The English word "*justification*" comes from the Latin word "*justificare*" which literally means, "*to administer justice*". Justification is a term that denotes a fundamental change in a person's *legal* status. Justification is a *legal* declaration of a person's acquittal of any crimes. To be justified in the legal sense, means that a person is declared to be just or righteous in the eyes of the law.

So what does that have to do with us as Christians? The answer is simple: when we are told in the Bible that we as believers have been "*justified*", it means that God has declared us to be acquitted of any and all of our sins. If a person is "*justified*" it means that they have been declared just or righteous in the eyes of the Lord. In the simplest sense, to be "*justified*" is to be made right with God. And to be made right with God is the greatest need that any person has in this world. Because unless we are justified (*made right with God*) we will die in our trespasses and sins (John 8:24). For as the Bible tells us, "*the wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23).

Our catechism gives us a beautiful definition of what it means to be justified when it says, "*Justification is the act of God's free grace by which He pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight. He does so only because He counts the righteousness of Christ as ours.*" Let's break this definition down into two parts. First of all, when a person is justified, it means that God "*pardons all our sins*". The first thing that occurs when a person is

justified by God's grace, is that all of their sins (*past, present and future*) are completely forgiven by God. Ephesians 1:7 tells us that if we've been justified *"we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace"*. For those of us who have been justified we can be sure of God's promise that, *"...As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."* (Psalm 103:11-12). If you've been justified by God's grace, all of your sins have been forgiven in Jesus Christ!

However, to be justified doesn't ONLY mean that our sins have been forgiven. Our catechism continues the definition by saying that God, *"accepts us as righteous in His sight. He does so only because He counts the righteousness of Christ as ours"*. Here we find the doctrine of *"imputation"* which is essential to our understanding of what it means to be justified. Not only does God forgive all our sins when we place our faith in Jesus, He also *"imputes"* or *"credits"* or *"counts"* Jesus' perfect and sinless record to us. On the cross God *"imputed"* or *"transferred"* our sinful record to Jesus, and God imputed or *"transferred"* Jesus' perfect record to us. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:21, *"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."* In other words, when we were justified (*made right with God*) *"He took our filthy rags and gave us His righteous robe"*<sup>1</sup>.

All of us need to be justified. All of us need to be made right with God. All of us need to have our sins forgiven and Jesus' perfect record transferred to us. And how does that happen? How is a person justified or made right with God? Contrary to what the world may think, it is not by doing good works or by being a *"good"* person or by joining a Christian church. As our catechism reminds us, *"Justification is received by faith alone"* in Jesus Christ. Have you placed your faith and trust in Jesus? If not, there's no time to waste. Today is the day to be made right with God!

## Dig Even Deeper into God's Word!

Romans 4:6-8

2 Corinthians 5:19

Galatians 2:16

Philippians 3:9

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<sup>1</sup> Ligonier Statement on Christology; 2016