

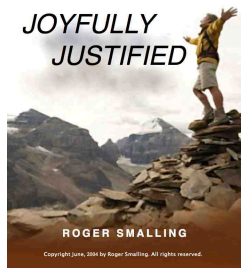
JOYFULLY JUSTIFIED

by

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Preface

Eating dry cereal without milk is distasteful. Nourishment, yes. Pleasure, no. So with some theology literature. True, but dry, lacking passion.

Of all topics that ought to be drenched in passion, justification by grace is supreme. Why? It's the gospel! Not a mere concomitant, but the gospel itself. New Testament writers always discuss it with passion.

Though this subject requires sound scholarship, I have tried to make it tasteful. For, as faith without works is dead, so is justification without passion.

About the Author

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The Smallings travel extensively throughout Latin America, holding seminars and conferences in churches of various denominations.

Study guides, essays, and books written by the Smallings are available on their website in both Spanish and English. The teacher's manual for Joyfully Justified is found there.

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Chapter 1: Let's Get Emotional

The apostle Paul was no icy theologian, expounding from nosebleed heights about judicial points. Though justification is a decree, not a feeling, it should have a visceral impact. First comes the knowledge we are justified, then enjoyment of the fact.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1).

How fitting he mentions peace first. The war is over. God is no longer angry. A sense of safety results, knowing God will never change his verdict of not guilty.

Gone is performance-based hope. Gone is conduct-based acceptance.

One way to enjoy our justification is to dwell on its permanence. This is our “state of grace.” Paul said,

...we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Rom. 5:2.

Now. Once justified, we *stand* in grace...*now*, (present continuous tense.) The state of grace for a justified believer never changes. This is true of weak and new believers, *for the Lord is able to make him stand. Rom. 14:4.*

No wonder Martin Luther said justification is the article on which the church stands or falls.¹

While other key doctrines illuminate grace in the gospel, justification by faith alone IS the gospel. This justifies (excuse the pun) why we devote an entire manual to justification.

Justification is high on the list of truths worth living and dying for. After all, it answers the question, “How can sinners be reconciled to a holy God and avoid his judgment?”

Justification by faith was the battle cry of the Reformation. Rightly so. The reformers wanted people to be saved, including themselves. What a shock it must have been to discover that for centuries Rome had deceived millions into believing a message of salvation that never saved anybody.

The reformers' zeal and unwavering convictions were well justified. To our present age, known for its tolerance of everything, including sin, they may seem to have overreacted. Not so. A predecessor modeled their passion: the apostle Paul.

Paul was usually congenial. His letters contain warm expressions of affection. From his parental tenderness toward the Thessalonians to his willingness to live or die with the wayward Corinthians, we see Paul's genuine sensitivity. Yet we hear him calling down anathemas thick and fast on those who *are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ* (Gal. 1:7).

When Paul uses the term “gospel” in Romans and Galatians, he means justification by faith. He declared any other description of the gospel as *really no gospel at all* (*Gal. 1:7*). Any alteration of his teaching was not a mere difference in perspective. It was apostasy.

For Paul, the term "justified" is virtually synonymous with *saved*.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! Rom. 5:9

For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. Rom. 10:10

We notice Paul's flexibility on minor issues, such as in Romans 14. Yet we detect no yielding when it comes to defining the gospel.

In Romans, he called the gospel *the power of God for salvation* (*Rom. 1:16*). What happens when the message is perverted? Any alteration is fatal because it loses its power to save. Sproul asks rhetorically,...

Does saving faith require a trust in the righteousness of Christ alone as the grounds of our justification? Or may a person have a different view of the gospel and still be a Christian? ²

A distorted gospel strikes at the heart of the righteousness of Christ himself, giving man glory due to God alone. It undermines his own security. He destroys the very ground that he thought was solid.

This is what Rome has done to millions. Time has not improved Rome's perversion of justification, despite Vatican II or the Ecumenical movement. There is as much need for exposing it today as ever.

Even among Evangelicals, misunderstandings occur about justification. These rarely jeopardize the gospel itself, though they always affect one's view of God, oneself, and principles of Christian living.

In this study, therefore, we will explore the two key elements of justification: forgiveness of sin and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. Some questions we will consider:

- Exactly what does the term “justify” mean?
- What is the difference between saving faith and any other kind?
- What is meant by the righteousness of Christ? Is there a spiritual essence infused into our soul?
- What is imputation?
- What are the objective and subjective benefits?

Afterwards, we will compare the biblical teaching on justification to Catholicism. Doing this is not meant to be unkind. It is intended to show the devastating consequences of errors involving this doctrine.

To define these errors is not theological hairsplitting. Like the doors of history, theology also turns on small hinges. Just as little events can generate huge impact over time, so minor errors can produce heresies.

Calvin calls this doctrine the "principal ground" on which the Christian stands:

The doctrine of justification...is the principal ground on which religion must be supported, so it requires greater care and attention. For unless you understand first of all what your position is before God...you have no foundation on which your salvation can be laid, or on which piety towards God can be reared.³

A Christian friend recently lamented, "Why can't we just stay simple? Why do we have to complicate everything?" The answer could well be stated: "We are not the ones complicating the issue." Others have taken the simple gospel and complicated it with unbiblical additions. Careful theologians know how to detect the errors that obscure the simple gospel. Nevertheless, this can be a complex task.

Let's clear up a potential misunderstanding. When we say justification by faith alone is the gospel, we do not mean everyone must understand the doctrine of justification to be saved. Most evangelistic preaching in the book of Acts expresses justification as forgiveness of sins through Christ alone.

That, in fact, *is* the doctrine of justification in its simplest form. We are preaching justification by faith when we say, "If you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, God will forgive you all your sins and give you eternal life." Paul used the term "justify" when preaching to people who understood the concept, such as in the synagogue in Antioch. (Acts 13:39)

Through this study we will see why Paul was passionate enough to write two large epistles on justification: Romans and Galatians. We also will discover why the reformers were willing to be burned at the stake for it. We will be challenged to preach the gospel with greater conviction, knowing that the outcome is inevitably: *...whom he justified, he also glorified* (Romans 8:30).

Conclusion

Justification by faith alone deserves special focus because it defines the gospel. Distortions of the gospel throughout history have made it necessary to distinguish the true gospel from false ones.

From this chapter we learn...

- Justification by faith alone is the biblical gospel.
- Various movements have distorted it into something unrecognizable as the gospel of Christ.
- We must be uncompromising on this doctrine precisely because it is the gospel. The apostle Paul and the reformers exemplified unwavering commitment to this doctrine.

Study Questions for Chapter 1

1. Explain why the doctrine of justification by faith merits thorough analysis.

2. Explain why Paul, in Galatians Chapter One, felt it appropriate to pronounce anathemas on those who disagreed with the correct definition of the gospel.

Chapter 2: The Meaning of “Justify”

Justification is a legal declaration by God that a person is righteous compared with his law. The ground is the perfect righteousness of Christ, imputed by faith alone in Christ alone.

This definition contains key words: "justify," "impute," "righteousness," and "faith." By showing how the Bible uses these, we will prove the above definition to be the only correct one. We will also show how errors in defining them lead to a corresponding distortion of the gospel.

The first word we will analyze is *justify*. Before this, we will do a brief review of the elements and principles already studied in *Unlocking Grace*. (The student should have read the chapter on justification in *Unlocking Grace*. If not, he must do so now.)

Elements of justification

Romans Chapter 4 portrays the two key elements involved with justification:

- Forgiveness of sins (Rom. 4:7).
- Imputation of the righteousness of Christ (Rom. 4:4).

Packer clarifies these two elements:

Justification has two sides. On the one hand, it means the pardon, remission, and non-imputation of all sins, reconciliation to God, and the end of his enmity and wrath (Acts 13:39; Rom. 4:6-7; 2 Cor. 5:19; Rom. 5:9). On the other hand, it means the bestowal of a righteous man's status and a title to all the blessings promised to the just: a thought that Paul amplifies by linking justification with the adoption of believers as God's sons and heirs (Rom. 8:14; Ga.4:4).⁴

The principles behind justification

- Justification is based on the Covenant of Abraham and is inseparable from it (Gal. 3:8, 29).
- God requires the righteousness of the law to be fulfilled in the believer (Rom. 8:4).
- Christ is our substitute before the law of God (Gal. 4:4-5).
- The righteousness Christ earned under the law is imputed to the believer through faith (Rom. 4:22).
- Justification is permanent (Rom. 8:30).

Word study: “To justify”

In teaching the doctrines of grace, I have noticed many Christians define the word “justification” as “to be **made** righteous.”

Incorrect. It means “to **declare** righteous” or “to be vindicated.”

In a theology class, a student remarked, “That seems like hairsplitting. There isn't really much difference.”

Wrong again. It makes the difference between Catholic and Protestant. It also distinguishes

between Reformed and Arminian. Those are pretty big hairs to split.

The Greek verb for “justify” is *dikaioo*. It is associated with the nouns for righteousness or justice (*dikaiosyne*) and a just person (*dikaios*). The words “righteousness” and “justice” are the same in New Testament Greek.

In biblical studies, a word takes its meaning from the context or its habitual usage throughout the Bible. As a rule, the context takes priority. If there is doubt about the context, we proceed to the habitual usage to determine the meaning in a specific verse. That is how we go about word studies in doctrinal research.

By the time we finish this word study on *dikaioo*, we will see why we use the phrase “*declare righteous*” in the definition above, rather than “*make righteous*.”

The verb *dikaioo* has a rich history in the Bible. Paul used it 27 times. It occurs 49 times in the Septuagint.⁵ In the following examples, we will highlight those words that translate the verb *dikaioo*:

*Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was **vindicated** by the Spirit, 1 Tim. 3:16*

The text refers to Christ. The incarnation was his appearing *in a body*. Being *vindicated* by the Spirit probably refers to his resurrection. In any case, the Spirit did not *make* Christ righteous. He was righteous already because he is God incarnate. The Spirit’s testimony of Christ via his resurrection and miracles *justified* or *vindicated* that Jesus was who he claimed to be.

*For by your words you will be **acquitted**, and by your words you will be condemned. Matt. 12:37*

Here, *dikaioo* is contrasted with condemnation, meaning “acquitted.”

Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: “So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge.” Rom. 3:4.

The verse refutes the accusation that God did not fulfill his promises. Paul clarifies that man violated the conditions God laid down, thus forfeiting the benefits. God is not “made righteous” by his own words. He is righteous already. The corruption of man “proves” his judgments are right.

*All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus’ words, **acknowledged that God’s way was right (Luke 7:29).***

The King James renders it as “justified God.” The people did not make God righteous. They only acknowledged that God IS righteous by the actions of Christ.

*But wisdom is **proved right** by all her children. Luke 7:35.*

Wisdom is not made righteous but shown to be so by its results.

*...he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be **just** and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Rom. 3:26.*

Here the noun form of *dikaioo* is used, *dikaios*, a righteous or just person, or righteous one.⁶ The word “he” refers to God, who accomplished redemption in a righteous manner. Nothing God did made him righteous.

Some texts from the *Septuagint*:

*When men have a dispute, they are to take it to court and the judges will decide the case, **acquitting** the innocent and condemning the guilty. Deut. 25:1.*

*Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not **acquitt** the guilty. Ex. 23:7.*

***Declare** the innocent **not guilty**, and so establish his innocence. 1 Kings 8:32.*

From these verses, we see why lexicons define "dikaioo" as

Louw&Nida: the act of clearing someone of transgression—‘to acquit, to set free, to remove guilt, acquittal.’⁷

Thayer: To declare guiltless one accused; to declare, pronounce, one to be just, righteous.⁸

Gingrich: justify, vindicate, treat as just; to be acquitted, be pronounced and treated as righteous.⁹

United Bible Societies New Testament, Lexicon: *put into a right relation; acquit, declare and treat as righteous;*¹⁰

The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology summarizes *dikaioo*:

It is thus a forensic term, denoting a judicial act of administering the law—in this case, by declaring a verdict of acquittal and so excluding all possibility of condemnation. Justification thus settles the legal status of the person justified.¹¹

The evidence shows justification is a “legal declaration” by God. If this is so, then by definition, justification has everything to do with law. The only law it could refer to is God’s moral law in the Old Testament, as summarized in the Ten Commandments.

Picture God declaring, “You have not broken the Ten Commandments.” In the next chapter, we will explore how God could say such a thing without contradicting his holy standard or telling a

lie.

By itself, justification has nothing to do with spiritual experiences. Important experiences accompany it, like adoption as his children and imparting of the Holy Spirit, with the joy, peace, and power he brings. Justification, however, deals with our legal status before God's law, without which none of the other spiritual experiences would be possible.

Legal jargon may seem cold. For Paul, justification was a stirring issue because it involves forgiveness of sins.

Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. (8) Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him. Rom. 4:7

Since sin is *the transgression of the law* (1 Jn. 3:4), then it is clear why a legal declaration from God is essential to reconcile us with him.

...we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. Romans 5:11

Conclusion

From the scriptural evidence, we see “justify” as a forensic (legal) term with the idea of acquittal or pronouncement of innocence. This involves forgiveness of sins through which we are reconciled to God.

From this chapter we learn...

- The word “justify,” in justification, means “declare righteous, acquit, pronounce innocent.”
- “Justify” does not mean “make righteous.”
- Justification is a forensic issue, not an experiential one.
- Justification has to do with the forgiveness of our sins.

Study Questions for Chapter 2

1. What are the two elements of justification?
2. What are the five general principles involved in the doctrine of justification? Express them in your own words.
3. Find another verse, other than those in the chapter, to support “justify” as a forensic term. Explain thoroughly.
4. Explain why justification is not an ‘experiential’ issue in and of itself.
5. Questions on the Westminster Confession:
 - a. What three things are NOT imputed to the believer, according to Article 1?
 - b. How does Article 2 define the word “faith”?
 - c. What two things did Christ do to satisfy the justice of the Father, according to Article 3?
 - d. What two attributes of God are glorified in the justification of sinners, according to Article 3?
 - e. Whom did God decree to justify, according to Article 4?

- f. According to Article 5, name one thing that can happen to those who are justified and one thing that cannot happen.
- g. Explain the relationship of believers under the Old Testament to justification according to Article 6.

Chapter 3: Imputation

“Is faith the basis of our salvation?” In my experience, many Christians answer, “yes.”

Theology students are often astonished to hear that faith is **not** the basis of our salvation. Saying this sounds heretical until we explain the basis is the righteousness of Christ. Faith is simply the means by which this righteousness is accredited to our account.

To assume faith is the ground of our acceptance with God is like saying a cement truck is the foundation of our house because the truck brought the cement. This is not to downplay faith. Without it, we cannot be justified. Our intent is to underscore the importance of imputation.

The centrality of imputation

Imputation is the central concept in justification. Ignoring imputation leads to confusion about our status before God. Though a Christian possesses the benefits of justification, he may fail to enjoy them all if he is unaware they exist.

Romans Chapter 4 is devoted to imputation. It forms the logical bridge between the depravity of man, explained in Romans 3, and reconciliation with God in Romans 5.

A poor grasp of imputation leads to widespread heresies. Catholics, some Arminians, and certain extreme Charismatic groups hold to errors on imputation. Some of these are benign, while others open the door to damaging heresies. We will deal with these errors in later chapters.

Imputation shuts the door on legalism. The moment we grasp the essence of imputation, we can easily detect legalism. Works-righteousness mentality has a harder time surviving. The book of Galatians comes alive for us like never before.

Imputation allows us to grow with confidence. Calvin expressed it this way:

For unless you first of all grasp what our relationship to God is and the nature of his judgment concerning you, you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation nor one on which to build piety toward God.¹²

What is imputation?

Imputation involves two aspects: Negatively, not counting our sins against us. Positively, counting the righteousness of Christ to us as ours.

It does **not** mean to remove anything. Nor does it mean to infuse or inject something. The idea of infusion is foreign to the meaning of the Greek word involved, *logizomai*. Other Greek words exist for those ideas.¹³

The theological term "imputation" is derived from the King James usage in Romans 4, which translates the Greek verb *logizomai* and the Hebrew, *hashab*.¹⁴ Modern translations use words like "credit," "reckon," or "account."¹⁵ Though such terms are adequate, the original Greek term

requires careful defining so we can see later what it does **not** mean.’

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The righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. Matt. 5:20.

Someone asked me, “Does your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees?” I replied, “Yes, it does...and not by a little bit either. In fact, it is light-years above theirs, a righteousness extending to infinity.”

He looked askance and said, “Well, that sure sounds arrogant!” I answered, “It would be if it were really my own righteousness. I borrowed it, though, from someone else, Jesus. I own no other righteousness but His.”

Usage in Greek

Note these lexicons on *logizomai*:

United Bible Societies Greek New Testament & Lexicon: *count, reckon, calculate, take into account; credit, place to one’s account; ¹⁷*

Louw&Nida: *to keep records of commercial accounts, involving both debits and credits—‘to put into one’s account, to charge one’s account, to regard as an account.’ [Greek: 4:4—“to de ergazomeno ho misthos ou logizetai kata charin alla kata opheilema”]- “to a person who has worked, the wage is not regarded (or ‘not credited to his account’) as a gift but as a debt to be paid (or ‘a debt owed to him’)”¹⁸*

Thayer’s Lexicon: *to take into account; to pass to one’s account; impute.¹⁹*

Let’s take a look at a couple of biblical usages not directly related to justification: [Bold letters indicate *logizomai*.]

*If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, **charge it** to me. Philemon 1:18.*

The Septuagint uses it as well:

*...that man shall be **considered guilty** of bloodshed [literally, have guilt imputed.] Lev. 17:4.
...if any meat of the fellowship offering is eaten on the third day, it will not be accepted. It will not **be credited** to the one who offered it, for it is impure; the person who eats any of it will be held responsible. Lev. 7:18.*

“Logizomai” occasionally translates as “suppose,” “consider,” or “think” in contexts having nothing to do with debt or guilt.

The Evangelical Dictionary summarizes:

'to charge to one's account'...is an adequate rendering of the Greek term *logizomai*. This forensic notion of imputation has its partial roots in the commercial and legal language of the Greco-Roman world; one who has something imputed to him is accountable under the law.²⁰

We see that *logizomai* is another legal term like “justify.” It refers to crediting something to an account. We are the debtors to God, and that “something” is the righteousness of Christ.

When an accountant credits funds to your bank account, he does not literally infuse money into a box belonging to you. It is ‘on the books.’ Likewise, the righteousness of Christ is not a *thing* or *substance* injected into us. Imputation is a *legal* transaction only, not an *experiential* one.

A possible misunderstanding

Does this mean our souls are left empty when we are justified? By no means! The Holy Spirit enters our heart. He confers all the benefits of our salvation.

God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. Rom. 5:5.

What are these benefits? The context of Romans 5 tells us a few: reconciliation with God, peace, joy, and the experience of the Father's love. Justification, with its key concept of imputation, gives him the grounds for doing all this for us without contradicting his holiness.

When we are saved, dramatic changes take place. We experience a new nature, the power of the Spirit, and the very real sense of being *clean* for the first time.

Imputation, however, does not refer to any of these experiences or to any inward change in and of itself. It merely makes it “legal” for God to do them for us. We have a new legal status before God as righteous people.

A common saying among Reformed Bible teachers to show the difference between legal and experiential righteousness is this: **Justification is what God does *for* us. Sanctification is what God does *in* us.**

Justification makes it perfectly logical for God to do all sorts of nice things to and for us. After all, he is doing them for people he now considers righteous.

This is why Hodge, in his excellent Systematic Theology, says,

Imputation never changes the inward subjective state of the person to whom the imputation is made. When you impute theft to a man, you do not make him a thief. When you impute goodness to a man, you do not make him good. So when righteousness is imputed to the believer, he does not thereby become subjectively righteous.²¹

Notice Hodge inserts the word “subjectively.” He is not denying the reality of subjective

experiences in the believer. Hodge simply attributes the subjective work of sanctification to the Holy Spirit's indwelling, not to imputation. The Spirit makes our *legal* righteousness in justification an *experiential* reality.

Hodge clarifies,

The Bible makes quite as prominent what Christ does for us [in justification] as what He does in us [in our union with Christ].... Protestants do not depreciate the value and necessity of the new life derived from Christ, because, in obedience to the Scriptures, they insist so strenuously upon the satisfaction that He has rendered by his perfect righteousness to the justice of God. Without the latter, the former is impossible.²²

Commutation

Sometimes writers use the word "commutation" in discussing imputation. This obscure word has the idea of an exchange between two people of one thing for another. (*Not in the sense of bartering.*) In this sense, our sins were imputed to Christ and his righteousness was imputed to us. An exchange took place between him and us.

The Puritan writer John Owen, commenting on Romans 4:6, expresses it as,

There is in the Scripture represented unto us a commutation between Christ and believers, as unto sin and righteousness; that is, in the imputation of their sins unto him, and of his righteousness unto them. In the improvement and application hereof unto our own souls, no small part of the life and exercise of faith does consist.²³

At this point, Owen continues his explanation using the idea of the scapegoat. In Lev. 16:21-22, the priest "imputed" the sins of the people to the goat and sent him off into the wilderness. Owen interprets this as a foretype of the imputation of our sins to Christ.

While the sacrifice of Christ is illustrated in the Old Testament via animals, Paul makes it explicit in Romans 3. Here we see the inseparable connection between justification and the sacrifice of Christ...a good example of why we should view biblical theology as an inseparable unit.

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement... (26) He did this...so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Rom. 3:25.

The Adam-Christ parallel: Why imputation is logical

Imputation of the righteousness of Christ is directly connected to the doctrine of original sin. In Romans 5, Paul draws a parallel between Adam and Christ.

For if, by the trespass of the one man [Adam], death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ? Rom. 5:17.

Owen explains this parallel,

...as Adam's actual sin is imputed unto us unto condemnation, so is the obedience of Christ imputed unto us to the justification of life. ²⁴

Just as the sin of Adam, and all its consequences, was imputed to Adam's descendants, so the righteousness of Christ is imputed to believers...and all its consequences. While it is true we are not personally responsible for Adam's transgression, neither do we merit the righteousness of Christ.

This illustrates the importance of *system* in our theology. A denial of original sin is a denial of imputation. After all, if it is impossible for Adam's sin to be attributed to us, neither can Christ's righteousness be accounted to us.

Reconciliation

*...that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not **counting** men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. [Word in bold indicates 'logizomai.'] 2 Cor. 5:19.*

Reconciliation with God is the entire point of imputation. Through reconciliation, God can stand on the same ground with a sinner, contradicting his own holiness. The common ground is the righteousness of Christ.

Conclusion

Imputation refers to God's dual act of not counting our sins against us and crediting to us the righteousness of Christ. As a forensic act, it does not mean the infusion or injection of anything. Imputation provides the basis for reconciliation. In turn, this allows him to bless us with the Holy Spirit and all the Spirit brings us.

From this chapter we learn...

- Faith is not the grounds of our justification but the means by which the righteousness of Christ is imputed.
- A good understanding of imputation helps us avoid serious doctrinal errors.
- Understanding imputation also helps us detect and avoid legalism.
- The Greek term *logizomai* means "credit to, reckon, attribute to the account of." It does not carry the connotation of infusion, injection, or a quality inherent in the person.
- One argument Paul uses to show the rationality of imputation is the doctrine of Original Sin expressed in Romans 5.
- Commutation expresses mutual imputation. In this case, the imputing of our sins to Christ and his imputation of righteousness to us.
- Reconciliation to God is the immediate consequence of the imputed righteousness of Christ. It provides the common ground on which God and man meet.

Study Questions for Chapter 3

1. Why is the doctrine of imputation important?
2. What is the meaning of the Greek term "logizomai"?
3. What is "commutation"?

4. Explain the connection between the doctrine of original sin and its relationship to imputation.
5. What is the relationship between imputation and reconciliation with God?

Chapter 4: The Righteousness of Christ

Shortly after the death of Martin Luther in 1546, the teachings of Andrew Osiander, a professor at Königsberg, troubled the Reformation in Germany.²⁵

Osiander held a view of justification radically different from the forensic (legal) concept taught by Luther. For Osiander, justification meant the infusion into the soul of a divine righteousness. This was similar to a Catholic error against which Luther had struggled so valiantly. Osiander therefore caused enormous controversy until his views were rejected at the Formula of Concord in 1577.²⁶

One of the reasons his views were rejected should be obvious to the student by now. Osiander rejected imputation in favor of an infusion of righteousness. For him, justification was more of an *experience* than a legal declaration.²⁷

Osiander believed correctly in the believer's mystical union with Christ. He wrongly based it on an essence emanating from God himself. For him, divinity was infused, as though God took a syringe, injecting righteousness from his person into us.²⁸

These views alarmed the reformers because they led to serious heresies. If we have the same essence as God, then it must follow we are a part of God's being. Perhaps we are gods ourselves. The distinction between God and man becomes blurred.

Though Osiander did not carry his teachings to such extremes, he could have logically. As a little leaven leavens the whole lump, so a little error leads to great heresies. Fortunately, the Formula of Concord stopped him in his tracks.

Osiander's errors forced scholars to refine their thinking about the nature of the righteousness we receive. Among the reformers, no one disputed the question of *whose* righteousness is involved in justification. All agreed it is Christ's righteousness alone by which God accepts us. The question was, "What is meant by the *righteousness of Christ*? Is it human righteousness, divine, or mixed? Is it a mere absence of sin or a positive quality of its own?"

Does it matter? Yes. It is one of the differences between Catholics and Protestants, as well as between Evangelicals and certain cults. Our security of salvation is involved in these questions.

What does the Bible mean by "righteousness"?

The Bible always defines moralistic terms in reference to God's Law. These include *righteousness, sin, wicked, justice, etc.*

... sin is the transgression of the law. (KJV) 1 Jn. 3:4.

Indeed, I would not have known what sin was except through the law. (NIV) Rom. 7:7.

Those who devise wicked schemes are near, but they are far from your law. Ps. 119:150.

Sin is breaking God's law, and righteousness is conformity to it (1 Jn. 3:4). The Ten Commandments summarize the moral law. While it is true that God has an attribute of his being called "righteousness," nevertheless, he defines it by his Law. Any *human* righteousness, therefore, must be conformity to God's Law.

Does God therefore require of us the righteousness of the law?

Absolutely!

*For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, (4) **in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us**, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. Rom. 8:3.*

What was lacking in the law as a means of obtaining righteousness? Nothing. The problem is our own weakness, not a deficiency in the law.

Does God accept people who do not fulfill the law's requirements? Never. Perfect obedience is the only ground on which God has ever accepted anyone.

Two kinds of righteousness?

Some teach there are two kinds of righteousness, that of the law and that of Christ. This is a mistake. The salvation Christ gained for us did not consist in removing the righteousness of the law and replacing it with his own. He fulfilled it, not replaced it. The written law simply describes how God would act were he to become man. And that is exactly what happened in Christ.

Christ's obedience

One asks, "Is the imputed righteousness of Christ human, divine, or a mixture?" The answer is clear: The righteousness imputed to us is a perfect *human* righteousness...the product of obedience to the law by a perfect Man, Jesus Christ. It is not, therefore, a divine essence infused into our souls.

For just as through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man [Christ] the many will be made righteous. Rom. 5:19.

Notice the word "man" is repeated. It was a human being who fell into sin (Adam) and a human being who paid the price for it (Christ). Righteousness, then, is based on the obedience of Christ as the perfect Man, representing humanity.

This evidence alone refutes Osiander. But there is more. Theologians place the obedience of Christ into two categories: active obedience and passive obedience.

By *active obedience*, they mean the life Christ led as a man under the law. By *passive obedience* they mean his death on the Cross. The Bible presents both of these aspects as fulfilling the requirements of the law in his humanity.

Christ's active obedience: his life under the law

Was it really necessary for Christ to fulfill the requirements of the law during his life and not just by his death? Yes. His role as mediator required it.

For we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Heb. 4:15.

In refuting Osiander, Calvin aptly points out how all of Christ's acts as mediator, insofar as gaining our righteousness under the law, were according to his human nature.²⁹

Hence I gather that Christ was made righteousness when "he took upon him the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7)... Therefore, he does this for us not according to his divine nature but in accordance with the dispensation enjoined upon him.³⁰

The apostle Paul exclaims,

For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 1 Tim. 2:5.

Notice how Paul adds the clause, *the man Christ Jesus* when it comes to his mediatorial role.

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law (5), to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Gal. 4:4

Paul reveals another reason for Christ to fulfill the law's requirements by living under it. Those he came to redeem were living under it also. It is fitting that their representative should live under the same conditions, succeeding where they failed.

By emphasizing "born of a woman," Paul focuses on the humanity of Christ in his work of obtaining our salvation.

...but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. (8) And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Phil. 1:7.

At his baptism, Christ acknowledges his relationship to the law and its requirements:

...it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness. Mt. 3:15.

Fulfilling righteousness means to satisfy the demands of the law. A form of baptism was necessary at the inauguration of a priest. Jesus was fulfilling this requirement (Numbers 8:7).

Matthew Henry agrees Jesus did this.

...to own every divine institution and to show his readiness to comply with all God's righteous precepts... Thus Christ filled up the righteousness of the ceremonial law, which consisted of various washings...³¹

Calvin likewise points out that Christ did not have to earn righteousness for himself because he was already righteous. If it were his own divine righteousness he came to bring to us, neither his life nor his death under the law would have been necessary.³²

Berkhof gives another reason why Christ's active obedience was crucial. If the righteousness imputed to us were forgiveness of sins alone, through the Cross, this would have left man in the same position as Adam before the fall...innocent but without a positive attribute of real righteousness.³³

Christ's passive obedience: The cross

Wherever the Bible talks about the sacrifice of Christ, it is his body under consideration...his humanity, not his deity.

The cross and the law

According to Colossians, Christ dealt with our condemnation under the law by his body on the Cross.

Once you were alienated from God...²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body... Col. 1:21

This reconciliation took place because a barrier was removed. That barrier was the law.

...having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the Cross. Col. 2:14

Peter expresses the idea as,

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree... 1 Pet. 2:24.

The reconciliation of Jew and Gentile

Paul declares the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile took place at the Cross, in Christ's body.

For he himself is our peace... (15) by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations... (16) and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the Cross... Eph. 2:14.

The veil of the temple

The veil of the temple represented the barrier separating God and man. The writer of Hebrews explains this veil represented the flesh of Christ through which we enter into fellowship with God.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, (20) by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh... Heb. 10:19.

The Lord's Supper

The communion service is a memorial of the bodily nature of Christ's sacrifice. Calvin expresses this point,

...when Christ would seal the righteousness and salvation that he has brought us, he sets forth a sure pledge of it in his own flesh. Now he calls himself "the bread of life" (Jn. 6:48), but, in explaining how, he adds that "his flesh is truly meat, and his blood truly drink" (Jn. 6:55). This method of teaching is perceived in the sacraments; even though they direct our faith to the whole Christ and not to a half-Christ, they teach that the matter of both righteousness and of salvation resides in his flesh. ... Institutes, Book III, Ch. XI.

What role did Christ's deity play in obtaining righteousness for us?

After Osiander, another teacher by the name of Stancarus swung the pendulum to the opposite extreme.³⁴ Stancarus claimed that the divine side of Christ played no role whatsoever in redemption. Supposedly, Christ suppressed his divine nature to focus entirely on the human task of earning righteousness for us.

Lutheran churches, at the Formula of Concord, rejected this view, as did all Reformed councils since.³⁵ The *Westminster Confession* says correctly that Christ acts according to both of his natures in all he does, not necessarily in the same way.

Christ, in the work of mediation, acts according to both natures, with each nature doing that which is proper to itself; Chapter 8, Article 7.

Are we contradicting ourselves? No.

Christ is our high priest according to both his natures. The book of Hebrews reveals his sacrifice earned him the right to be the mediator of his people, interceding for them before God and applying the benefits he gained for us. Only a deity, with the attributes of eternity and omnipotence, could fulfill the function of applying his righteousness to us. Moreover, it is precisely because of his deity that his righteousness is of infinite value.³⁶

How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! (15) For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance... Heb. 9:14

We can say without contradiction that Christ is our righteousness according to both his humanity and his deity, yet without infusing into us a righteousness as a divine essence.

Conclusion

The scriptures clearly define the nature of the righteousness imputed to us through faith in Christ. It is a perfect *human* righteousness, earned for us by Christ through his life and through his death as our representative. This means no divine essence is infused into us, nor is there any change in our essence as humans. We are not deified in any sense by the righteousness of Christ, nor exalted above what God originally made us to be as human beings.

Christ's life and death under the law earned him the right to mediate as our High Priest. In this role, he acts according to both natures, God and man.

From this chapter we learn...

- The righteousness Christ imputed to us is that which he earned under the law, both by his life and by his death, as a representative man.
- This righteousness is not a divine essence infused into us.
- Though the righteousness imputed to us is not an infused divine essence, nevertheless Christ is our righteousness according to both natures.
- Christ, as our mediator and High Priest, acts according to both natures and is himself our righteousness

Study Questions for Chapter 4

1. What was the error of Osiander?
2. How does the Bible define the term righteousness?
3. What were the two kinds of obedience of Christ?
4. Why was it necessary for Christ to fulfill the law by living under it and not merely dying under it? Give three reasons with scriptural proofs.
5. Explain the rationale for the emphasis in scripture on the humanity of Christ, rather than on his deity, in earning righteousness for us.
6. Show how Christ's office of High Priest and Mediator involves both of his natures, human and divine.

Chapter 5: Justifying Faith, Simple or Not?

I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. Mark 10:15.

If a child can exercise faith, doesn't this prove faith is simple? Not necessarily. The active ingredient in faith, simple trust, is more direct in children because the other two elements, knowledge and reason, present fewer problems for them.

While this explains why even a child can enter heaven, it doesn't prove faith is simple. Faith, like other aspects of the Gospel, is both simple and profound. Children grasp it easily, while scholars delight in its depths.

If faith were entirely simple, the apostle James would not distinguish one kind leading to justification from the other ending in condemnation (James 2). Nor would we see the apostle Paul in Romans 4 giving a breakdown of faith's essential components, using Abraham as the example.

We need to exercise faith with the simple trust of children, yet not remain childish in our understanding of it. Though we avoid complicating faith beyond biblical limits, neither do we simplify it any further. Besides, some of the complexities result in delightful surprises.

The next surprise

No sooner do students recover from the surprise that faith is not the basis of our salvation, but the righteousness of Christ is, then we hit them with another: justifying faith, *by itself*, has no intrinsic value, possesses no merit, is not a good work, and deserves no reward.

As with the first surprise, this one loses its radical tone with a little explanation. Faith is like an empty box. It takes its value from its contents. If the box contains Christ, then its value is immeasurable. What if the box contains the devil? What value does it have then?

Faith, therefore, is morally neutral, taking its value from the object to which it is associated. Looking at it this way, faith may not even be a virtue, unless it is directed toward Christ. In fact, it can even become an evil thing, such as faith in a false god or faith in one's own righteousness.

What about 1 Cor. 13:13? Paul classifies faith as one of the three great virtues along with hope and love. The context assumes our affections are directed toward Christ. Paul does not imply faith in *anything* is a virtue, any more than he would consider love a virtue if it were directed toward a neighbor's wife. In the secular world people use the term "faith" when they really mean hope, self-confidence, or a mystical religious feeling.³⁷

The reformers were adamant that faith is not meritorious. They stood in sharp contrast to Catholicism, which views faith like a good work, deserving of a reward. Such a view undermines salvation by grace alone because of the subtle way merit enters the picture.

Why is faith not meritorious?

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? Romans 4:1.

Abraham made an unexpected discovery. God granted him something he did not deserve...forgiveness of sins and a declaration that he was righteous.

Abraham immediately concluded it could not have been because of his good works. He had none to speak of, or the Bible would have spoken of them...certainly nothing that would earn Abraham the right for one of his offspring, Christ, to rule the nations.

If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about... (V.2)

So, the vehicle for justification had to be something he already possessed, yet which he could not brag about. This excludes works because he could brag about them since they deserve a reward.

Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. (V.3)

The only existing agent is faith and faith alone.

However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. (V.5)

Paul proves faith is not a work and deserves no reward. Otherwise, he would exclude it as the vehicle of justification.

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace... (V.16)

By concluding that faith is the only possible vehicle of grace, Paul reveals a paradox:

Faith would be an unworthy vehicle of grace if it were a work, a merit, or the possession of inherent righteousness. It would become a rival of the righteousness of Christ, and *that* is unthinkable.

Instrumental cause

A minor squabble broke out during the Reformation period, particularly in Poland, because of the heretical teachings of an eccentric Italian named Socinus, born in 1539.³⁸

Among these was the notion that our faith itself is the righteousness we receive in justification and the only righteousness we need. Not only did this amount to an implicit denial of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, but it also meant that faith itself did the work of saving us.

This amounted to a subtle and dangerous redefining of *sola fide* (by faith alone). Those who embraced this idea would affirm that we are saved by faith alone. This would mean we save ourselves by our faith, which is a form of righteousness. This was a radical departure from what the reformers meant.

Socinianism died out even before the death of Socinus. Yet this particular teaching persists today

in Arminianism.³⁹

Millions of Christians today believe their own faith is their righteousness, or that it was faith itself that saved them. They miss the beauty of Christ's own imputed righteousness and the security that comes from understanding it.

Socius missed the point in Eph. 2:8-9:

...by grace you have been saved, through faith...

Apparently Socius could not grasp the difference between "through" and "by." It is grace that does the saving. Faith is the means *through* which grace comes.

From this comes another surprise: Faith itself does not save us. It simply makes it possible to receive something that does the saving...**grace**.

A subtle logic trap lies here. To say it is impossible to be saved without faith does not mean faith is the cause of the saving. Christ himself is the cause.

Reformers, then and now, quickly saw that if faith itself were our righteousness, and if the faith came from us, then it follows that we save ourselves by our own righteousness. Any need for the imputed righteousness of Christ goes out the window, which in turn makes the active obedience of Christ, his life under the law, meaningless.

The reformers attacked this error by showing a distinction between *efficient* cause and *instrumental* cause. A good example is the difference between a sculptor and a chisel. The sculptor is the *efficient* cause because he is the one doing the work. The chisel is the *instrumental* cause because it is the instrument, or means, by which the sculptor labors.⁴⁰

In salvation, God's grace is the *efficient* cause. It involves the divine favor of forgiveness of sins with the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. This righteousness becomes the basis for our acceptance. Faith is merely the *instrumental* cause that brings to us the *efficient* cause.

This phrase, "instrumental cause," has become standard theological terminology for contrasting the biblical view of the relationship of faith to salvation with the errors of Catholicism, Arminianism, and related movements. Calvin compares:

For scripture everywhere proclaims that the efficient cause of our obtaining eternal life is the mercy of the Heavenly Father...the formal or instrumental cause is faith.⁴¹

Calvin points to the Father who does the saving. The means God uses is faith. God is the God of the indirect. See how easy it is to confuse the means (faith) with the source (God)?

Others, like the outstanding English scholar John Owen, used the term "instrumental" repeatedly when teaching on justification.⁴² For refuting the teaching that our own faith is our righteousness, my personal favorite scholar is Francis Turretin. His arguments are succinct and striking.⁴³

Berkhof mentions, "The name 'instrumental cause' is used regularly in Protestant confessions.⁴⁴ An example is the Heidelberg Catechism:

63. Why do you say that you are righteous by faith alone? It is not that faith has any worth or merit to God, for it is not a work or meriting condition, but it is God's instrument through which He gives me the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; 2:2), and it is the only way that He does this (1 John 5:10).⁴⁵

The Westminster Confession concurs:

Faith—receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness—is the only instrument of justification.⁴⁶

Below is a summary of common arguments used by Reformed scholars, both ancient and modern.

The Scriptures teach that Christ himself is our righteousness

...he has been made unto us righteousness. 1 Cor. 1:30.

Turretin comments, *Scripture nowhere says that God willed to count our faith as righteousness, but that He made Christ unto us righteousness.*⁴⁷ He then points that if Christ himself is the righteousness, then nothing that proceeds from us, faith included, could be that righteousness. *...it is evident that a man cannot be justified by two righteousnesses (one in himself, the other in Christ.)*⁴⁸

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. Jn. 1:12.

How do we become the children of God? By receiving Christ. How is Christ received? By believing in him. The point: Believing in oneself does not grant the right to be called God's children. Receiving Christ does. Faith is the instrument.

The Scriptures consistently distinguish between the righteousness that is imputed and the faith that receives it

...and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. Phil. 3:9.

This is probably the most important verse in the Bible on the relationship between righteousness and faith. Paul first distinguishes between the righteousness by which he is "found" in Christ and any righteousness of his own. This righteousness has a source outside himself, namely God, and comes through faith. This refutes the doctrine that equates faith with righteousness.

Nevertheless, Paul does not denigrate the necessity of faith. He hastens to add a phrase, which at first seems repetitive: *the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.*

Notice the change in prepositions from “*through faith*” (*dia pisteos*) in the first part of the verse to “*by faith*” (*epi te pistei*). This clause literally reads “upon the faith.” Notice the article “*the*” and the preposition “upon” are in the second clause and not the first. This makes the Greek grammar strong and implies something like, “upon condition of that sort of faith, period.” Paul means this kind of faith is the sole condition and is so essential, we never receive any righteousness without it.

Like a skier avoiding barriers, Paul skillfully navigates between two errors. He wants it clear that faith is absolutely indispensable, even though being found in Christ is based on something outside of us, a righteousness that comes from God.

If Paul were a philosopher today, he might say the righteousness of Christ is the *efficient* cause of our acceptance, while faith is the *instrumental* cause.

Our faith is not perfect in this life

Turretin comments,

...we are not justified except by a perfect righteousness. For we have to deal with the strict righteousness of God... Now no faith here is perfect.⁴⁹

Hodge adds indignantly,

What comparison is there between the absolutely perfect...righteousness of Christ and our own imperfect Evangelical obedience as a ground of confidence and peace!?⁵⁰

The grammar of the original Greek demands this distinction.

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. Rom. 3:22.

The Greek phrase here for “*through faith*” is *dia pisteos*, which can only mean “by” or “through” faith. This is the genitive case in Greek and denotes instrument.⁵¹ If Paul meant faith itself is righteousness, he would have used the accusative case, which would read *dia pistin* (“*because of faith,*” or “*on account of faith*”). This construction does not exist in the New Testament.⁵²

Theologians for the past four hundred years have pointed out this important grammatical point, yet the notion persists widely that faith itself is our righteousness.

Owen notes,

...**διά** is nowhere used in the whole New Testament with a genitive case, but that it denotes an instrumental efficiency.⁵³

Turretin, in refuting the Catholic notion that faith justifies meritoriously, said:

The scripture never says this but always either "by faith" or "through faith" (*dia pisteos*) as by an instrument.⁵⁴

Berkhof states:

*...according to the Bible we are justified by faith, **dia pisteos**, and that this **dia** can only be understood in an instrumental sense.*⁵⁵

The most common misunderstanding

What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' Rom. 4:3.

Paul is quoting from Genesis 15:6, which is the Old Testament verse most often cited in the New Testament. Paul refers to it four times in Romans Chapter 4 alone.

At first sight, it appears Paul is saying God counted Abraham's faith itself as his righteousness. If so, it would contradict everything else he said about the relationship between faith and the righteousness of Christ. We already saw in Romans 3:22 that righteousness comes from God through faith. This distinguishes the two. Calvin summarizes:

For faith is said to justify because it receives and embraces the righteousness offered in the gospel.⁵⁶

How do we challenge this misinterpretation?

In the context of Romans 3:22, Paul is contrasting faith with works, not faith with righteousness. This is important to keep in mind as we look at the Greek grammar:

The phrase "as righteousness" is *eis dikaiosune*. The preposition "eis," translated here as "is" often translated in the Old King James as *unto*. It implies the idea of "movement toward." The nuance is something like "with a view to obtaining righteousness."

This supports the idea of instrumental cause and certainly does not convey substitution, with the idea of faith being the righteousness itself. If this were Paul's intent, he would have used other Greek prepositions, such as *anti* ("instead of") or even *hyper* ("on behalf of").

Turretin points out how the benefit from something is sometimes associated so closely with its cause that the cause is used metaphorically as a synonym.⁵⁷ Example: In Jn.17:3 and 12:50, obedience to God's command (which must include faith) is called "eternal life."⁵⁸ The obedience itself is not the life but leads to that.

A good example of this is when Jesus said to a repentant woman, *Your faith has saved you.* (Lk.7:50) He meant the woman's faith opened the door to the One who does the saving. He would never imply that the woman's faith did the saving without him. If that were the case, she need not have bothered coming to Jesus at all.

Likewise in Romans 4, faith is so vitally associated with obtaining righteousness that the two are

mentioned almost as one. A little care with our logic proves this. The first immediate result of faith is the forgiveness of sins (Romans 4:7). Just as faith itself is not forgiveness of sins but leads immediately to it, so faith is not righteousness but leads immediately to it.

Summary

Faith is both simple and profound. Paradoxically, it is the only worthy vehicle for conveying grace, precisely because it is not meritorious. It takes its value from the object to which it is directed...Christ.

Faith is the sole “instrumental” cause of salvation, but not the “efficient” cause. The scriptures always talk about salvation as *by* faith or *through* faith but never *because of* faith. This means faith alone, apart from works, conveys the Christ who does the saving. It is not, therefore, righteousness itself, but the means to that end.

From this chapter we learn...

- Faith is simple and profound at the same time, with surprising ramifications.
- Faith takes its value from the object to which it is directed. In scripture, this is always Christ alone.
- Faith is not inherently meritorious or deserving of reward.
- If faith were meritorious, it would be excluded as a means of conveying grace, because grace itself is unmerited.
- It is helpful to distinguish between instrumental cause and efficient cause when discussing the relationship between faith and righteousness.
- Salvation is always “by faith” or “through faith” but never “because of faith.”
- It is a serious error to assume faith itself is our righteousness. This would make faith meritorious, like a work. It would also mean we are saved by our own righteousness, not the righteousness of Christ.

Study Questions for Chapter 5

1. Explain why faith is not inherently meritorious.
2. What is the difference between *instrumental* cause and *efficient* cause?
3. Give reasons why justifying faith is *instrumental* and not *efficient*.
4. Explain why Gen. 15:6, quoted in Rom. 4:3, does not teach that faith itself is our righteousness.

Chapter 6: Essential Ingredients of Justifying Faith

Justifying faith contains three essential ingredients: **knowledge, reason, and trust**. If one is missing, we have a problem.

Romans Chapter 4 contains all three elements. Using Abraham as the example, Paul not only proves faith is the only means of justification, but he also reveals its components.

As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. (18) Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." (19) Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. (20) Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God (21), being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. (22) This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." Rom. 4:17-22

Reformed theologians generally agree on these three elements.⁵⁹ The student may encounter their Latin names: *noticia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*.

First element: Knowledge (*noticia*)

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. Heb. 11:6

A minimum of knowledge, *noticia*, is necessary to come to God. In computer language, this is *data*. A computer cannot operate without data. Neither can the human mind.

We cannot believe in something unless we know it exists. Nor can we trust it if we are ignorant of its purpose. A primitive native, unfamiliar with automobiles, is unlikely to hitchhike. Even if he knows they exist, he must know what they can do.

Likewise, workable knowledge of anything must contain two elements: knowledge of its existence and minimal knowledge of its attributes.

To trust in God, we must know he exists. Even this knowledge, however, is insufficient to trust him. We need information about his character and abilities. Abraham had this minimal knowledge...God, *in whom he believed (V.17)*

Paul does not bother to explain how Abraham knew of God's existence or his key attributes. Perhaps this came through natural revelation or some religious tradition. Regardless, Abraham confronted two opposing facts:

A material impossibility

...he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. (V.19)

The promise, along with knowledge of God’s attributes

I have made you a father of many nations. (V.17)

Before receiving the promise, Abraham hoped he would have a son. What transformed mere hope into faith? The divine promise. (V.16)

The promise was solid data to work with. Faith, based on a promise, gives substance to hope. So says the writer of Hebrews,

"...faith is the substance of things hoped for... Heb. 11:1

On occasion I have used a special glue that comes in two tubes. Neither tube is useful until they are mixed. Together, they become super strong.

This happens when we mix a divine promise with our hopes. The promise is the indispensable catalyst that engages our reason. The result is faith.

Abraham correlated his physical limitations with the power of God to overcome them. He correctly deduced that impediments, like death, are irrelevant to God. So is the time frame.

...the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. (V.17)

Second element: Reason (assensus)

...he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead...yet he did not waver... (v.19)

Abraham engaged his reason when he chose the promise of God over the material impossibilities (his advanced age and Sarah’s infertility.) It made sense (*assensus*) to trust God to keep his promise because Abraham knew (*noticia*) that God has the power to overcome all hindrances. The ability to connect these dots is what we call *reason*.

I have met mystics who tend to trivialize knowledge and reason as secondary or inconsequential. They appear annoyed to hear that these are vital ingredients of faith. They seem to feel their personal religious experiences are more substantial and spiritual. They are not.⁶⁰

Knowledge and reason are non-negotiable to biblical faith. It cannot operate without them any more than a computer without software.

Third element: Trust (fiducia)

...being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. (V.21)

The first two elements, knowledge and reason, never saved anyone. They amount to mere mental assent. This mental assent is a *necessary* condition but not a *sufficient* condition. Sproul comments,

James got at this when he wrote, “You *believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe this and tremble*” (2:19). Here sarcasm drips from the apostolic pen. James was making the point that meeting the first two necessary conditions of saving faith does not guarantee salvation. It merely qualifies one to be a demon.⁶¹

At some point, Abraham made a choice to trust God to fulfill his promise. This came from the depths of his being. He was *fully persuaded*. It was a personal commitment involving every fiber of his being; first his reason and then his will. This was no superficial decision. He made it *against all hope*, choosing to ignore *the fact that his body was as good as dead* along with every other factor contradicting the promise of God.

This kind of commitment is *fiducia*, which we call “simple trust,” or perhaps, “personal commitment.” However, “simple” does not mean “superficial.” Figuratively speaking, he threw himself headlong onto the promise of God with complete disregard of every other factor, whether circumstances outside himself or abilities within. This is justifying faith. No other kind justifies.

Where do works come in?

The Bible contrasts faith with works when discussing salvation but links them inseparably for Christian living. A superb example of this is Eph. 2:8-10.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God—(9) not by works, so that no one can boast. (10) For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Yes, saved by grace, through faith, without works. But to what purpose? ...*To do good works*. Is this a mere exhortation to get busy and do good works? No. It is a declaration that good works are inevitable...*which God prepared in advance for us to do*. Genuine faith can no more fail to produce good works than it can fail to convey justification. God himself guarantees it.

This led reformers to form a motto...*by faith alone, but not by faith that is alone*.⁶²

When a ship plows through the water, it leaves a wake. This wake is not a part of the ship, but the unavoidable result of its movement. So is the relationship between faith and good works.

It makes no sense to ask, “What if a Christian produces no good works?” That is like asking, “What if a moving ship produces no wake?” The answer to this second question is, “There is no such ship.” Likewise with the first question, “There is no such Christian.”

Reformed confessions acknowledge the inevitable connection between faith and works. The

Lutheran Formula of Concord, 1577, states:

That good works certainly and without doubt follow true faith, if it is not a dead but a living faith, as fruits of a good tree. Chapter IV, Art. 1

The Westminster Confession of Faith, 1648, concurs.

These good works, done in obedience to God's commands, are the fruits and evidences of a true and living faith. Ch. 16, Art. 2 ⁶³

The Heidelberg Catechism, 1573, proclaims the impossibility of a faith unaccompanied by works:

67. But does not this teaching make people careless and sinful? No, for it is utterly impossible for one who is in union with Christ by true faith and renewed by the Holy Spirit not to bring forth the fruits of gratitude (Matt. 7:18; John 15:5).

James and Paul: An apparent contradiction

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. James 2:26.

It sounds like James is teaching faith+works=salvation. If so, we have a serious problem. James would be contradicting Paul. Worse, he would be contradicting himself.

In Acts 15, the Jerusalem council confronts a doctrinal controversy. Certain converted Pharisees were teaching, *The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the Law of Moses.* (V.5) The debate records refutations from two apostles, Peter and James.

Peter's observations came first. He declares he personally witnessed Gentiles being saved by faith alone. *He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.* (V.9) Then he explains why it makes no sense to require those Gentiles to keep the law since it was "...a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear..." (V.10). We Jews were unable to keep it, says Peter. Why expect it Gentiles?

Then Peter closes with this decisive comment: *We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are* (V.11). Peter establishes that salvation is through the grace of Christ, by faith, without the works of the law.

After a report from Paul, James gives his speech. In it, he endorses Peter's presentation (V.14). He agrees so completely with Peter, he even quotes a scripture to support it. He then echoes Peter's final statement about not requiring Gentiles to keep the Law with his comment, *that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles* (V.19). He then adds an important remark about **testimony**.

Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. (21) For Moses has

been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath. Acts 15:20

Why would James be concerned about what is preached in a synagogue if the converts in question were Gentiles? Remember how Paul's missionary report was sandwiched between Peter's speech and that of James? Many of Paul's converts were Gentile proselytes to Judaism whom he had won to Christ in the synagogues. Undoubtedly these converts had many devout Jewish acquaintances. James was concerned about how the gospel might appear to these Jews. They might misconstrue it as a message of licentiousness and abandonment of God's holy standards.

If we keep in mind James' concern about TESTIMONY, then his discourse in James 2 on faith and works becomes clearer. It explains clauses like, *Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.* (V.18) and, *...if one of you says...but does nothing...* (V.16)

In the context, James says nothing about the justification of guilty sinners nor their forgiveness of sins. James was not asserting faith+works=salvation. He was saying, "Faith = salvation + works."

When Paul used Abraham to illustrate his point, he referred to the day Abraham was justified by faith, upon believing God's promise for a son. (Gen. 15:6)

James also uses Abraham as an example...but James refers to another time and circumstance...when Abraham offered up Isaac. We may not know the exact age of Isaac at the time. We do know, however, that he was old enough to carry a load of wood up a hill, large enough for a burnt offering, and discuss the matter with his father. He could not have been younger than around 12.

Remember that "justify" does not mean "make righteous" but "vindicate" or "declare righteous." We know that Abraham wanted a son. Was he using God to get what he wanted? Or, was God truly the supreme value in his life? His action of offering Isaac back to God vindicated the reality of his personal commitment (*fiducia*).

This is how Abraham, already a "friend of God," was "justified." It was the genuineness of his faith in offering up Isaac that was "justified," or "vindicated."

The author of Hebrews concurs by calling the incident with Isaac a test:

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. Heb. 11:17.

God does not *test* the faith of the unsaved, for they have none. He tests the faith of believers. Through testing, our faith matures and is *made complete* (James 2:22). It grows. This is what happened to Abraham. His obedience did two things for him: it declared his faith to be the righteous kind and helped his faith to mature.

Living things move and grow. Dead things do nothing. So with saving faith. It works and grows. This is what James meant by *faith without deeds is dead* (V.26).

Looking at it this way, Romans 4 and James 2 are sister chapters, mirror images of each other. They perceive the same issue from opposite angles.

The Evangelical Dictionary summarizes superbly,

In James 2:21, 24-25, its reference is to the proof of a man's acceptance with God that is given when his actions show he had the kind of living, working faith to which God imputes righteousness.... The justification that concerns James is not the believer's original acceptance by God, but the subsequent vindication of his profession of faith by his life.⁶⁴

Calvin expresses,

...he is not discussing the mode of justification, but requiring that the justification of believers shall be operative.⁶⁵

Hendricksen, on James 2:14, concurs.

Are Paul saying one thing and James another? Not at all. ... James explains the active side of faith and Paul the passive side. ... James directs his remarks to the person who says that he has faith but fails to put it into practice.⁶⁶

Summary

Saving faith contains three elements: knowledge, reason, and trust. Though the first two make personal trust possible, trust is the active ingredient. Though faith alone is the vehicle of justification, genuine faith always results in obedience. The apostles Paul and James concur on this, using Abraham as an example, though from different perspectives.

From this chapter we learn...

- Justifying faith contains three elements: knowledge, reason, and trust. The theological terms for these are "noticia," "assensus," and "fiducia."
- Though faith excludes works as the vehicle for justification, works inevitably follow a genuine living faith.
- The apparent contradiction between James and Paul is resolved by these facts:
 - James and Paul used different incidents in Abraham's life to illustrate different purposes.
 - Paul referred to Abraham before he was justified by faith. James referred to Abraham after he was justified by faith.
 - Paul distinguishes between faith and works. James distinguishes between true faith and dead faith.
 - Paul was concerned primarily about testimony before God. James was concerned with testimony before man.

Study Questions for Chapter 6

1. Describe the three basic elements of justifying faith and why each one is essential.
2. What was a motto during the Reformation having to do with the relationship between faith and works?

3. Explain why James' statement "Faith without works is dead" does not teach that salvation is partly by works and partly by faith.

Chapter 7: The Benefits

We have already seen the first two components of justification: forgiveness of sins and imputation of the righteousness of Christ. Now we'll take a look at the two objective benefits: adoption and eternal life.

Adoption means God accepts us as his children. In Galatians, where justification is the theme, Paul explains how adoption is a central benefit of justification because it makes us children of God.

...God sent his Son...that we might receive the full rights of sons. (6) Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." (7) So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir. Gal. 4:4-7.

Berkhof neatly summarizes adoption.

Believers are first of all children of God by adoption. ... This adoption is a legal act whereby God places the sinner in the status of a child... By virtue of their adoption, believers are, as it were, initiated into the very family of God, come under the law of filial obedience, and at the same time become entitled to all the privileges of sonship.⁶⁷

According to Titus 3, justification is the grounds on which the gift of eternal life stands.

*But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, (5) he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit (6), whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior (7), **so that**, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:4.*

Though regeneration (*rebirth*) is essential, it is not the basis of eternal life. Regeneration is the preliminary outpouring of the Holy Spirit to prepare a person to be justified by grace so that we may have eternal life.

This excludes any righteousness of our own. Neither our degree of personal obedience nor good intentions are reasons why we keep our justification. We keep it for three reasons:

- The sentence of condemnation our sins deserve, whether past, present, or future, has been remitted.
- The righteousness of Christ is now our own.
- We have been adopted as God's children.

Could anything we might ever do rival these three as the reasons the Father continues to accept us?

Twenty-one ways to lose our justification

Just for fun... what would have to be true of justification in order to lose it?

If Christ himself were not our righteousness.

...Christ Jesus... our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 1 Cor. 1:30.

If the righteousness of Christ were not a total replacement for our own.

...not having a righteousness of my own... Phil. 3:9.

If justification were something we did to ourselves.

It is God who justifies. Rom. 8:33.

If our righteousness were earned, rather than a gift of grace.

...how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Rom. 5:17.

If God could be convinced to accept accusations against justified people.

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Rom. 8:33.

If our own continued obedience, rather than the imputed obedience of Christ, was the basis of our acceptance with God.

...through the obedience of the one man [Christ], the many will be made righteous. Rom. 5:19.

If our righteousness had its origin in ourselves rather than in God.

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. Rom. 3:22.

If justification were not a judicial decree from God.

...he [God] did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Rom. 3:26.

If the decrees of God could be changed.

...for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Rom. 11:2.

If our sins now have the power to nullify the righteousness of Christ when they were not a hindrance in the first place.

Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him. Rom. 4:8.

If our faith, which can waver, were our righteousness.

...not having a righteousness of my own ...Phil. 3:9.

If genuine faith does not produce obedience.

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. James 2:26.

If our hearts were purified in some other way than through faith.

...for he purified their hearts by faith. Acts 15:9.

If it could be shown that God will not glorify some he justifies.

...those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. Rom. 8:30.

If some in Christ walk after the flesh rather than the Spirit.

...who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. Rom. 8:4

If justification were based on something other than grace.

...so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. Tit. 3:7.

If justification did not result in commitment to righteousness.

You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. Rom. 6:17.

If Christ fulfilled only part of the righteous requirements of the law, leaving the rest for us.

*...in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be **fully met** in us, Rom. 8:4.*

If justification were not free.

...and are justified freely by his grace... Rom. 3:24.

If my present and future sins are not provided for in my justification.

Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him. Rom. 4:8.

If eternal life, given through justification, is not a permanent kind of life.

...so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. Tit. 3:7.

Isn't this fun?!

This exercise addresses the frequent concern, "Do you believe in once-saved-always-saved?" A good answer is "I believe in once-justified-always-justified." If the person is unsure what is meant by the word "justify," this gives an opportunity to explain.

The *Westminster Confession* puts it this way:

God continues to forgive the sins of those who are justified. Although they can never fall from the state of justification, they may by their sins fall under God's fatherly displeasure and not have the light of his countenance restored to them until they humble themselves, confess their sin, plead for pardon, and renew their faith and repentance. Chapter 11, Art. 5.

In a court of law, no one can be condemned without a trial. The trial cannot take place until the court receives an accusation. This is the "indictment." If the judge refuses to accept the indictment, no trial occurs.

This is precisely what the Lord does with respect to believers. Let's imagine the devil coming before God's throne. Satan says, "Let me tell you what your child Henry did! He..." God interrupts. "How dare you come in here and bring accusations against my children? How *dare* you! I declared Henry not guilty once and for all! Get out of here!"

Does the story end there? Not yet. After the devil leaves, God says, "Henry, may I have your attention for a moment? I have something I would like to discuss with you."

Does this mean God is declaring we did nothing wrong? No. God never denies the facts. It means that "judge" is not a role he plays with us anymore. He is "Father" forever.

This is why Christians are not called "sinners" in the Bible. They are *saints*, holy ones, not because they are without sin but because they stand in the righteousness of Christ.

When Paul assured us of no condemnation, he was not denying our remaining corruption. He was only emphasizing the penalty, for it has been remitted.

Why doesn't the Bible answer the question?

For years I puzzled over why the Bible does not address plainly whether a Christian can lose his justification. Just one verse would settle it.

After understanding justification better, I realized the answer: The question ignores the biblical definition of a Christian as well as the meaning of salvation. Once we see the imputed righteousness of Christ as a permanent judicial decree, the question is answered.

Inevitably someone asks, "What if a person is saved and then commits murder and adultery while drunk and then dies? Will he go to heaven?"

The question is not really a question. Sentences with mutually exclusive elements are invalid. It is like asking, “What is the sound of one hand clapping? What is a circle when it is square? If a sinful person is holy, will he go to heaven?” The answer: None of these are valid questions because the definitions are mutually exclusive.

Like positive and negative charges, self-contradictory premises neutralize each other. It does not matter if the nonsense is in the form of a question, a statement, or an illustration. So with the question, “Can a Christian lose his salvation?” Nonsense is still nonsense.

The reason, therefore, why the Bible does not pose the question of whether a Christian can lose his salvation is because the Bible does not deal with nonsense.

If a justified person is led by the Spirit, with a mind-set on the things of the Spirit, and has a living faith that obeys God, then by definition he does not live a depraved life.

Does this mean we can be disobedient and continue to be saved?

Of course! That’s what happens to Christians every day, anyway. None of us obey perfectly. We sin, to some degree, daily.

Turn the question around backwards. Does this mean God accepts our imperfect obedience as a condition to continue to be saved? If we say yes, then we must answer, “Where in the Bible does God ever accept imperfect obedience?”

Or, are we suggesting our continued salvation is based on our imperfect obedience?

Carnal-mindedness is another matter. Though our obedience is imperfect, we desire a life of obedience and struggle daily against being controlled by the sinful nature. If this is the case, why bother with the question?

...the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Rom. 8:7 ... You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. Rom. 8:9.

Justification drives a wedge between sin and condemnation

Ordinarily, sin links us to condemnation. After all, *sin produces death*. (James 1:15) The whole purpose of justification is to break that link.

According to Paul, it is sin that Christ condemns, not the Christian. Before justification, sin condemned us. After being justified, it is sin that is condemned.

If justification could be lost through sin, how much sin and what kind? Would a person lose his salvation over a white lie or an act of gossip? Nowhere does the Bible insinuate some sins deserve condemnation and some do not.

To say a Christian can lose his justification, we must hold to a dual list of sins...those that condemn,

versus those that do not. This amounts to mortal versus venial sins. We find no such distinctions in the Bible, nor a hint that some sins do not deserve condemnation.

Here's the dilemma: To say our personal obedience is the condition for remaining saved provokes a dilemma. Does this mean perfect obedience or imperfect obedience? If the reply is "perfect obedience," then who could be saved? No one is perfect. If the answer is "imperfect obedience," then we must ask, where in Scripture does God accept imperfect obedience for anything?

The dilemma is resolved the moment the perfect obedience of Christ enters the picture.

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Heb. 4:16.

Summary

The knowledge of justification should lead to a greater experience of peace, love, and joy through the Holy Spirit. As a divine decree, it is permanent. Its core is the imputed righteousness of Christ, not our own. It severs the ordinary connection between sin and condemnation.

From this chapter we learn...

- Our continued acceptance with God as his children is based on our justification, not our performance.
- Certain character-development issues influence our service to God, our personal happiness, and our qualifications for leadership. These have nothing to do with God's acceptance of us as his children, through justification.
- Justification could be lost only if it were based on another righteousness than that of Christ alone.
- The Bible does not directly answer the question of whether a Christian can lose his salvation because it is already answered by the nature of justification.
- Justification severs the ordinary link between sin and condemnation.

Study Questions for Chapter 7

1. What are the two objective benefits of justification?
2. What are some of the subjective benefits of justification?
3. Give some reasons for getting excited about justification.
4. Give five reasons why justification is permanent.

Chapter 8: The Roman Catholic Doctrine of Justification

If anyone says that by faith alone the impious is justified...let him be anathema.
-Council of Trent, 1545 A.D., Canon IX.

Somebody is in BIG trouble!

The Roman Catholic Church pronounces a divine curse on any who teach justification by faith alone. "Anathema," in the quote above, means "cursed."

This word is found in Galatians 1:8-9, where Paul denounces those who teach a different gospel. To anathematize someone means to declare his or her teachings are so evil that God does not recognize such a teacher as Christian. This may explain why the NIV translates "anathema" as "eternally condemned."

This curse is one of many the Council of Trent pronounced in response to the Protestant Reformation. The *Catholic Catechism* quotes Trent as authority for the validity of this *anathema* today.⁶⁸

Despite this, Evangelicals remain confused about Rome's stance on justification. The reason is because knowledgeable Catholics sometimes say they believe in justification by faith.

Rome indeed teaches a type of justification by faith, but **not** justification by faith ALONE. *Fide*, yes. *Sola Fide*, no.

The problem, however, goes much deeper than the mere absence of the word ALONE. This becomes minimal when we examine the way Catholicism uses the words "justification" and "faith."

Whiskey in a milk bottle

Filling a milk bottle with whiskey is not necessarily wrong. It would be wrong, however, to give someone the bottle and call it milk.

This depicts what happens frequently in theology. Scholars take words, empty them of their original meaning, add their own content, and pass them off as legitimate. A good term for this is *Semantic Manipulation*.⁶⁹ (*Semantic* means "relating to meaning in language.") This causes people to accept an idea they would ordinarily reject, by changing definitions.

In defining justification, Catholicism has stripped every term of its scriptural content and furnished its own.

Rome's Definition of Justification ⁷⁰

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By declaring that justification is a process, Catholicism openly rejects the judicial, or forensic view discussed in Chapter Two. The Catholic Encyclopedia titles the heading on justification: **The Process of Justification**⁷³

Why? Partly because the Latin verb *justificare* means "to make righteous."⁷⁴ The Latin Vulgate, translated by Jerome in the fourth century, is the official Bible of the Catholic Church. It translates the original Greek "dikaiao" as "justificare."⁷⁵

Do the Catholic theologians ignore the meaning of the original Greek "dikaiao" (declare righteous)? Not entirely. Catholic theologians agree it means that but fail to carry it over to the biblical imputation of Christ's righteousness. This has to do with the idea of "infusion" of righteousness, which we will discuss in the next section.

Catholicism talks about "inherent" righteousness as the reason why God "declares" some people righteous. Once baptized, that person receives a partial infusion of righteousness, enabling him to do good works for salvation. This righteousness is inward. It is "inherent" in the person, not "imputed."

So when Catholic theologians concede that *dikaiao* means "declare righteous," they mean God merely observes the personal righteousness of a person and declares the facts of the case as he sees it. God "declares" the person righteous because that is what he is.⁷⁶

In the New Testament, "inherent" righteousness is absent from the definition of either *dikaiao* (justify) or *logizomai* (impute).

(For a superb explanation of this point, see Appendix A from the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.)

Catholicism confuses justification with regeneration and sanctification. This is another reason why they see justification as a process.⁷⁷ They fail to grasp the biblical *ordo salutis* (order of events in salvation.) The Bible places regeneration before justification (Tit. 3:4-7), and then sanctification accompanies it (1 Thess. 5:24).

One Catholic writer attempts to prove imputation means "infused," not just "imputed." He does this by giving a list of verses, which at first sight seems impressive. By looking up these verses, I noticed nearly all of them were about sanctification and regeneration, not justification.⁷⁸

This is circular reasoning. Such proof texts are only valid if we grant that sanctification and regeneration are a part of justification. The apostle Paul did not grant this, nor should we.

While regeneration and sanctification are closely associated with justification, the Bible distinguishes them.

But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Cor. 6:11

Some Catholic theologians take the confusion a step further by basing justification on sanctification, making sanctification the grounds of eternal life.⁷⁹ This contradicts Titus 3:7.

...so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

In biblical theology, God justifies us *legally*, making it possible to sanctify us *experientially*.

Catholicism turns this on its head by making no distinction between legal and experiential.

Catholic definition of imputation

Though Catholic theologians recognize *logizomai* (impute) as a legal transaction, they nevertheless insist it also means “infuse.”

This is because Catholicism rejects the judicial nature of justification altogether, especially the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. Infusion, yes. Imputation, no.

What is the difference, and is it important?

Catholicism is essentially syncretistic, with the concept of *merit* at its roots. (A *syncretistic* view of salvation means a mutual effort between God and man. God saves man partially and then man finishes the job by his own efforts.)

If justification is only partial, it cannot be a final decree. Judges do not say, “You may now leave the jail partially.” Nor does Paul say Abraham’s faith *was credited to him as PARTIAL righteousness*.

We cannot have our *logizomai* cake and eat it too. It cannot be *infused* and *imputed* at one and the same time. It is either judicial, and therefore complete, or experiential...and perhaps partial.

So, to maintain its syncretistic stance, Rome must view obtaining righteousness as a partial *infusion* of a divine substance, not an imputation of a completed righteousness. Rome does this with vehemence.⁸⁰

Turretin attacks the partial righteousness idea with equal vehemence, pointing out there is no such thing as a partial righteousness in justification, according to scripture. How could a person have peace with God based on justification, asks Turretin, if he thought the righteousness on which it is based were only partial? ⁸¹

Turretin concedes that the word *logizomai* has various meanings in scripture. But it never means infusion.⁸²

The concept of infusion takes another strange turn when we examine more closely the word *righteousness*. Catholicism seems to view it as a divine substance, part of God’s own being. Though Rome does not teach man may become divine,⁸³ or a part of God himself, she comes close to it with the mediation of Mary and Saints. Notice the word *deifying* in the following quote:

...sanctifying or deifying grace received in Baptism.⁸⁴

Righteousness, according to scripture, is obedience to the divine law. It is not a spiritual substance. It hardly makes sense to decree, “I hereby infuse into you a partial obedience to the law.”

Partial obedience?! The apostle James clearly said partial obedience is **sin**. It is all or nothing.

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. James 2:10

If Rome had said we are infused with the **complete** righteousness of Christ, we might be tempted to consider the idea. But **partial?!**

The whole idea of *infused* righteousness is a quagmire of theological confusion.

The role of good works

If any one says,... that the justified, by the good works which he performs,...does not truly merit increase of grace, eternal life, and the attainment of that eternal life...let him be anathema. -Trent, Session Six, Canon 32.

This declaration refers to the second stage of justification in which a person merits eternal life through good works. Trent anathematizes any who deny this.

Rome confuses the presence of good works, as a **fruit** of justification, with good works as a **condition** for justification.

Catholic definition of grace

In Catholicism, “grace” does not mean a sovereign divine favor given to the elect. It means a strengthening to help merit eternal life.⁸⁵

So, when a Catholic talks about being saved by grace, he means receiving divine assistance to help him save himself by his own merits. Grace, in Catholicism, is not sovereign.

Roman theologians believe fallen man is able to fulfill the divine law, at least in part. The fall of Adam left us weakened, but not spiritually dead. Grace, like the righteousness of Christ, is merely supplemental.

...original sin has weakened and deflected, but not entirely destroyed or extinguished the freedom of the human will ⁸⁶

They chide Protestant theologians for teaching man has no righteousness at all without Christ.⁸⁷

The Bible, on the other hand, tells us the mind of unregenerate man is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. (Rom.8.7) The reason is clear: there is *There is no one righteous, not even one*, (Rom.3:10)

Catholicism speaks of the “infusion” of grace

The grace of Christ...infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin...⁸⁸

This results in another strange definition. Is grace a divine substance to infuse? We saw in chapter Five that grace is unmerited divine favor. Grace, therefore, is an attitude in the mind of God. Is the

grace received in baptism a divine attitude infused into the souls of believers? Does this make sense?

The infusion idea makes grace akin to an intravenous injection to strengthen a patient so he can go home and cure himself. Grace is stripped of its sovereign power and reduced to a medicine. Grace, in Catholicism, saves no one. It only makes it possible to save oneself.

The Catholic concept of merits

The entire edifice of Catholic theology is founded on the concept of *merits*. The term is so central to Catholic literature, it is hard to find a document on salvation without it.

The word ‘merits’ occurs nowhere in scripture. Yet the Catholic Encyclopedia asserts:

In the theological sense, a supernatural merit can only be a salutary act (*actus salutaris*), to which God in consequence of his infallible promise owes a supernatural reward, consisting ultimately in eternal life,... -Catholic Encyclopedia.⁸⁹

Apparently “merit” is any act that is *salutary*, which means “producing a beneficial effect.”⁹⁰ In the above definition, God “owes” us reward. The ultimate reward he “owes” for our “salutary acts” is eternal life. Grace flies out the window.

The word "merits" was so pervasive in medieval theological literature that even the writings of the reformers were drenched with it. They only began to elude it by talking about being saved by the “merits of Christ” as opposed to one’s own merits.⁹¹

This could be a bit misleading because the Bible never speaks of righteousness as “salutary acts” producing a “beneficial effect.” It always refers to righteousness as fulfillment of the divine law... not because of beneficial effects, but just because it was the divine law.

Personal suffering is high on the Catholic merit list. Supposedly it allows us to share in the sufferings of Christ. In Catholicism, Christ’s sufferings, like all other aspects of his work, are supplemental to our own. Catholics agree we could never suffer enough to expiate our sins. This, however, does not mean we are exempt from suffering. Christ’s sufferings were not intended to replace ours completely but to show us how it is done. Given this perspective, Catholic self-flagellation is perfectly logical. Friar Paul O’Sullivan exclaims:

Now, if we offer our sufferings—the very little ones as well as the greater ones—in union with the sufferings of Jesus Christ, we are doing the easiest and best penance we can perform. We may thus deliver ourselves entirely from Purgatory, while at the same time gaining the greatest graces and blessings.⁹²

I cannot count the number of times I have shared the gospel with Catholics and had them reply, “Oh, but you do not know how much I have suffered!” Older people are prone to say this, having endured the bumps and bruises of life. They express it with intensity and sincerity.

This reaction bewildered me. I tended to think, “What in the world does *that* have to do with the gospel? I was talking about salvation by grace!” In their mind, they are saying, “If you only knew how much merit I have, you would not bother me with your message. You would go to someone with fewer merits.”

A great *salutary act* would be to throw the term "merits" out of our vocabulary. If we do this, we discard Catholicism also, because the two are inextricably intertwined.

A Catholic counterattack

Catholic theologians claim Paul never used the word “alone” when teaching justification by faith. On these grounds they claim *sola fide* is a Protestant invention.⁹³ Faith, they argue, is a *necessary* condition but not a *sufficient* condition. Baptism and good works must be added.

It is far easier to explain the absence of the word “alone” than for Catholics to defend the absence of the word “merits.”

In Romans 3, Paul emphasized more the absence of works than the presence of faith. There was good reason for this. The Jews never questioned the need for faith. The issue was the value of good works.

Suppose two men, Henry and Joe, are in a room. Henry leaves. If we are narrating the incident, we may emphasize either the absence of Henry or the presence of Joe. If we say, “Henry is not in the room,” then Henry’s absence is the point of the story. If we say, “Joe was alone,” then Joe’s presence is the point.

Now let’s put Mr. Works and Mr. Faith in the room. Along comes Paul, grabs Mr. Works, and puts him out. Then Paul locks the door and nails four signs on it saying, *not by works; if grace then not works; not works of righteousness; not our own righteousness.*

Catholicism comes along and says, “Well, Paul, I notice you did not say Mr. Faith was in the room alone. I guess that means Mr. Works is in the room after all.”

Is Paul addressing small children unable to deduce that two minus one equals one? In Romans, he credits us with the intelligence of adults. If the word “alone” is not there, it is either because it is superfluous or because it does not convey plainly enough the absence of works.

Review of the Catholic view of justification

By agreement with the dogmas of the Catholic Church (faith), a person receives baptism (instrumental cause) to wash away his sins. He receives a partial infusion of grace (a supplemental divine help) and righteousness. This puts him into a “state of grace” to help him merit eternal life.

This “state of grace” can be lost through mortal sins but recuperated through the sacrament of penance. This involves suffering and good works.

Salvation, in Catholicism, is a cooperative work between God and man. God takes the initiative, but man finishes the work by his own merits.

Summary

The Roman Catholic Church has distorted the biblical teaching on justification until it has reversed the very definition of the gospel. Rome has changed the gospel from a sovereign work of God, entirely free, to a works-righteousness system based on human merits.

Rome has taken every single word involved in the doctrine of justification, emptied its biblical content, and inserted meanings consistent with its own synergistic theology. In addition, the Catholic Church has anathematized any who disagree.

From this chapter we learn...

The Roman Catholic Church teaches...

- Justification is a two-stage process initiated by baptism.
- Baptism, not faith, is the instrumental cause of forgiveness of sins.
- Faith is mental assent to the dogmas of the Catholic Church. Though fiduciary faith is laudable, it is unnecessary for justification.
- Grace is defined as a divine assistance to help a person do works necessary to merit eternal life.
- Sanctification and regeneration are a part of justification.
- Righteousness is obtained by infusion, not imputation.
- Initial justification through baptism can be lost by mortal sin and recuperated by the Sacrament of Penance.
- Anyone who affirms the doctrine of justification by faith alone is anathema.
- Anyone who says justification does not include good works and merits is anathema.

Study Questions for Chapter 8

1. Describe in one or two paragraphs the Catholic doctrine of justification.
2. Describe what Catholic theologians believe happens in the first stage of justification.
3. Describe what Catholic theologians believe happens in the second stage of justification.
4. Explain why Catholicism believes eternal life is granted in the second stage of justification and not the first.
5. Explain the Catholic definition of the following terms: "justify," "impute," and "grace."
6. Explain why Catholics believe justification can be lost in this life.
7. Explain the Catholic concept of merits and refute it.

Chapter 9: Shadow Eaters, a Dark Side in the Reformed Faith

A British naturalist who collected animals for zoos, Gerald Durrell, tells how he captured a number of African birds and small mammals.⁹⁴ He kept them in cages for several weeks. Due to political turmoil, he could not export the animals to Britain and was forced to free them.

He opened their cages to let them go. To his surprise, some refused to leave. They had become comfortable in their cages, nourished and sheltered from predators. He resorted to prodding them out with a stick, but the moment he stopped, they went back in.

Durrell was obliged to destroy the cages to prevent the animals from staying. They had lost their taste for freedom.

So it is with some Christians. They prefer the secure confines of rules, only to miss out on a world of adventure.

“Every man harbors a Pharisee in his heart,” observed the radio preacher. I agree. Remnants of corruption remain as long as we live and often generate legalism.

Legalism is the assumption we get righteousness by following rules. Like the Galatians, some suppose we are justified by faith but sanctified by law. Paul protests,

Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Gal. 3:30

The other day I wanted something. I thought to myself, “I’ve been good lately. God will probably give me what I ask.” A moment later, I realized this thought was atrocious.

I had fallen into the familiar trap of legalism, assuming God would reward me for my own righteousness. “You old Pharisee!” I thought. “You teach grace and then assume God might bless you on the grounds of your own goodness.”

Why do we relapse into such snares? None of us escapes entirely the influence of our old nature. A subtle drive for autonomy and self-validation remains.

Our old nature is ego-centered. This feeds legalism. Since God’s law did not originate from the self, man feels the urge to supplement it. We develop new rules apart from those God gave. Urging others to comply is even better since it lends an illusion of authenticity. Our sinful nature considers religious practices acceptable as long as self is in control.

The legalist misses the point: Self is the problem. Attempting righteousness by rules only strengthens our autonomy. This in turn leads to more sin.

Are rules bad? No. However, rules can never produce righteousness. The Ten Commandments are still valid. We sin by breaking them, but they are powerless to make us righteous.

Legalism does nothing to improve carnality. The proof is in the way legalists treat free people.

Reformed legalism

Every Christian movement has its unique brand of legalism. Since grace is the central theme, we would expect the reformed movement to be free of legalism. Some have avoided it. Others, considering themselves ‘truly reformed,’ have fallen headlong into it.

This is a warning. Like a tree, all movements develop branches while maintaining core values. Some branches are fruitful, others sterile. Even within grace theology, legalism exists, and some would rob us of our liberty.

Why grace works and legalism does not

Grace succeeds because it is based on a relationship with Christ. He is not only sufficient but also indispensable. He is not a supplement to our righteousness. He IS our righteousness.

Some fear the freedom of grace may lead to a disregard of the divine law. The opposite is true. We find ourselves following Christ more closely, who is always in accord with the divine law. Here’s the biblical pattern.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. Titus 2:11

First, grace brings salvation. We do not bring it to ourselves. What then? Grace does not say, “I started you on the right path. The rest is up to you.”

It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age. V.12

Once grace brings salvation, it stays around and teaches us godly living. Anyone who implies that grace is freedom to sin is calling licentiousness by the wrong name.

When we grow in grace, we become more free yet less libertine. Grace allows us to relish our present acceptance with God, as opposed to the legalistic mere possibility of a future acceptance.

Legalists suppose they have divine authority

The legalist is convinced he is standing firmly on the authority of the divine law. Instead, he has one foot on the law and the other on the remnants of his own corrupt nature. This is slippery ground. Neither foot is planted on the imputed righteousness of Christ. The sins of pride, self-righteousness, and judgmentalism have a foothold.

Laws always produce more laws, not more righteousness. They multiply like germs in a Petri dish. This is why Jewish rabbis, not content with Old Testament law, wrote the Talmud, a set of volumes expanding the law to the size of an encyclopedia.

Legalists imagine they are mature

Freedom is an ambiguous concept, tricky to define. Where does freedom end and license begin? Laws are concrete, while principles are ethereal. Children require rules due to their undeveloped faculties. As they mature, they understand the principles.

Paul alluded to this.

Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25 But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. Galatians 3:24-25 (NKJV)

We can remain children led by a tutor if we choose. Or we may be free, mature adults acting on principle.

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. Rom. 14:1

The legalist is a spiritual weakling. Like a straw man propped up by sticks, so the legalist props himself up by petty rules. Though he thinks he is strong, he is going nowhere.

Rules are like scaffolding for building a wall. Once the wall is built and can stand on its own, the scaffolding is no longer needed.

Legalists assume strictness is holy

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules? 21. "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!" 22 These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. 23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. Colossians 2:20

Religious strictness usually makes things worse. Paul had been a strict Pharisee, so he knew the legalistic mindset. Pharisees were detailed about laws. It was the one about murder they overlooked.

More strict equals more sin. Why? Because *the power of sin is the law*⁹⁵. It is the crutch on which the carnal nature leans to work at full capacity.

God's risk

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. Galatians 5:13

Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. 1 Peter 2:16

Free from what? Rule-based righteousness. Humanly speaking, God takes the risk that we might abuse our freedom to indulge the flesh. If this were not so, these warnings would not be in scripture. The warnings are proof of just how free we are.

Should we fear we might abuse grace? That's like a doctor saying, "I'm giving you a prescription, but be careful because it might make you forget you are sick." This is precisely what the prescription is intended to do.

How does legalism enter the reformed camp?

Some reformed teachers ignore an important principle of biblical interpretation: the New Testament interprets the Old, not vice versa.

It happens due to a misuse of the idea of covenant. God made a covenant, a kind of agreement, with Abraham. This is the Christian covenant, sometimes called the covenant of grace. Galatians Chapter Three teaches this clearly.

This covenant binds the Old and New Testaments together. Some reformed teachers take this concept further than the apostles intended. Launching from the idea of the unity of the testaments, they drag Old Testament law into Christian living. Such practice is like reading the Bible to the end, then like a rubber ball hitting a wall, bouncing back and getting stuck in Deuteronomy.

Shadow-eaters

*The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming — not the realities themselves.
Hebrews 10:1*

Imagine a person trying to eat a shadow. Such a ludicrous sight must be how God views us when we fall into legalism. To some, the shadow seems so real, while the reality is ethereal. A lamb sacrifice seems concrete, the atonement of Christ ethereal. Shadows make poor nourishment.

The book of Hebrews is the New Testament's declaration about the Old Testament and how much of it applies to Christians. Which of these two propositions is correct?

- From the Old Testament, we accept into Christian living anything the New Testament does not prohibit.
- We accept from the Old Testament only those things the New Testament says we must.

The second proposition is correct. If the law is only a shadow, then it makes no sense to drag from it everything we can into Christian living.

The Old Testament is what the New Testament says it is and no more. We have no authority to drag anything into Christian living from the Old Testament unless the New Testament requires it. If we do, we are attempting to feast on shadows rather than realities.

This pattern of shadows versus realities is the underlying structure of the book of Hebrews. Everything in the law is a shadow unless the New Testament says it is not. What aspects of the law does the New Testament authorize for Christians?

- The moral law as expressed in the 10 Commandments.⁹⁶
- Examples of divine judgments so we may avoid evil. 1Cor. 10:6
- A resource for worship. Eph. 5:19
- The covenant of grace. Gal.3:1-14

That's about it.

Some reformed teachers start with the wrong proposition and insert into the New Testament errors of emphasis we will study below. Several exist but we will touch on two prominent ones.⁹⁷

Strict sabbatarianism

Two views of the Sabbath prevail among reformed churches: those who believe the Sabbath is a day and those who believe it is not a day. The former, we may call Sabbatarians; the latter, *non-Sabbatarians*.

Sabbatarians believe Christ changed the Old Testament Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday by rising from the dead on the first day of the week. Since the only thing that changed is the day, the original Old Testament injunctions against working or recreation on the Sabbath must be in force. The only work allowed is necessary social services, such as medical personnel or police.⁹⁸

Non-Sabbatarians declare the Old Testament Sabbath was only a symbol pointing to faith-rest in Christ. The Sabbath, by this perspective, is not a day and was never meant to be. Sabbath observance therefore has no more inherent value than a lamb sacrifice. If we ask a non-Sabbatarian if he keeps the Sabbath, he is likely to reply with something like, "Yes, I keep it every day, because I trust in Christ every day."

Both camps agree, however, that Christians should worship on Sunday because this is the day on which Christ rose from the dead.

Regardless of one's position, our desire is to warn against any who would lead one into legalism by dictating what they can or cannot do on Sunday.

Even among Sabbatarians, opinions vary about what is permissible on Sunday. Some refrain from going to a restaurant because it obligates others to work. They eat at home. Instead of the waitress working, Momma does. Even if the food is prepared the day before, somebody puts it on the table and washes the dishes.

I have two friends who practice this whom I do NOT consider legalists. Why not? Both declare they practice this as a matter of personal preference to honor the Lord, while respecting the consciences of those who do otherwise. This is not legalism. It is their form of worship.

During my ordination exam, someone asked if I thought it was permissible to play ball on Sunday after church. I replied, "For you guys who have kids, this is what I recommend. After church, put your Bible away, take the kids to the park, and play ball, and count it as a work of mercy for your wife." To my delight, the assembly erupted in laughter and passed the question.

What was the attitude of the apostles about this?

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. Colossians 2:16

Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Rom. 14:13

Paul declares we have a certain freedom of conscience with regard to how we celebrate the Lord's Day. We are free to celebrate according to our conscience. We are not free to judge one another.⁹⁹

The regulative principle

In Canada a few years ago, a controversy arose over a bizarre practice of hysterical laughter in some churches. It was called 'holy laughter.'¹⁰⁰

The proponents of this movement defended it with the question, "Where in the Bible do you see it forbidden?" Others asked, "Where in the Bible do you see it commanded?"

Which regulates Christian worship? Anything not forbidden or only what is commanded? Logically, it must be one or the other.

The second option is biblical. God himself regulates worship by his word. We are not free to do whatever we please. We call this the regulative principle.

In the Old Testament, we see worship regulated to the last detail. As we would expect, this principle is broadened in the New Testament. We see commands by the apostles to 'sing songs, hymns, and spiritual songs,' preach the word, administer ordinances, and serve one another.

Rather broad, isn't it? We would expect this of apostles who celebrated a new freedom in Christ.

The way some Reformed teachers treat the relationship between the Testaments reminds me of people who dislike the shape of a French horn. They take a hammer and laboriously straighten it out so the exit is as narrow as the mouth. Then they look up with a satisfied smile, pleased at the intensity of their labors and depth of wisdom about the correct shape of French horns.

Perhaps the tone of their horn sounds better to them. To me, it sounds hollow.

Since the gospel is now for people of all cultures, we see the practicality of a broadening of the regulative principle. Cultures vary widely in music and expression of worship.

Some reformed people are uncomfortable with the spirit of freedom in worship we see in the New Testament. As with other aspects of Christian life, freedom frightens them. So they question every practice, attempting to bind the conscience of Christians with details about worship.

One small denomination forbids the use of musical instruments. Part of the complex argument they use is that musical instruments are not commanded in the New Testament. (Legalists need complicated arguments to justify their position. Freedom is simple.)

True, we find no command in the New Testament to use musical instruments. What we find is the command to live as free men, within the broad limits the New Testament authorizes.¹⁰¹

Other issues?

Christians have asked me, is tithing obligatory? Are alcoholic beverages in moderation a sin? Should we sing Psalms only? What about altar calls? Are academic degrees necessary to preach?

If the reader has understood this chapter, he will already know the answers to such questions.

Conclusion

A friend said, “If you are not enjoying your freedom, then you need to talk to the Lord because you have a problem.”¹⁰²

If the Pharisee in our hearts has his way, he will bind us, and that is no fun. Worse, he will use us to bind others.

As long as we are in the flesh, we will be at war with him. Do not let him win.

From this chapter we learn...

- Legalism is the assumption we may obtain righteousness by following rules.
- Legalism afflicts all Christian movements to some degree.
- Legalism is based on the remnants of corruption remaining in Christians.
- Being more strict is not necessarily more holy.
- The Old Testament is what the New Testament says it is, and no more.
- We have no authority to drag into the New Testament anything from the Old Testament unless the New Testament says we may.
- Legalism sometimes enters the reformed camp by interpreting the New Testament in the light of the Old Testament instead of the reverse.
- In the New Testament, we have greater liberty in questions of worship and the Lord’s day.

Study Questions for Chapter 9

- What is legalism?
- Why does legalism, in some form, afflict all Christian movements?
- Why do we say that legalists are immature?
- What is an error of interpretation some reformed teachers may commit? Why do they fall into it?
- Which book of the Bible most thoroughly describes the relationship of the Christian to the Old Testament?

- Which of the two presuppositions below is correct, and why?
 - Either we bring into Christian living from the Old Testament law anything the New Testament does not forbid,
 - Or, we bring into Christian living only those things the New Testament says we may.
- What do we mean by our freedom in Christ?
- In what way are we bound by the moral law (the 10 Commandments), and in what way are we free from it?
- In what way have you been a legalist in your private Christian life and in your treatment of other believers?

Chapter 10: Quit Calling Yourself a Sinner

Quit calling yourself a sinner, at least not all the time. After all, God calls you a saint.

Yes, you are a sinner, all the time.¹⁰³ Contradiction? No. I merely said, “Quit *calling* yourself that.”

Christians take their identity from Christ, not themselves. Adam no longer represents us. So God’s word is perfectly consistent in calling us saints even though we sin. Have you noticed how many epistles are written to sinners? None. How many to saints? All of them.

Nor does God seem interested in any ‘balance’ between sinner and saint. So quit the balancing act and throw yourself headlong into grace. If you tend to be one-sided, wallow in grace.

Christian movements often invent formulas for rising above temptation or stresses of life. This allegedly frees the believer from the struggles others experience. This creates two classes of Christians: the elite who claim special victory and the rest of us.

Some Pentecostals, for example, have their ‘baptism in the Holy Spirit.’ Supposedly, after receiving this experience, one is elevated to this new dimension where struggles are minimal.

Nazarenes and Methodists believe in a ‘sanctification’ experience in which the remnants of one’s carnal nature are supposedly eradicated. (They commit ‘mistakes’ but not sins.)

The reformed movement, despite its emphasis on the sovereignty of grace, has not escaped formulas. We will take a closer look in a moment.

For the sake of this chapter, we will label such formulas as *mysticism*. This is the belief that an elite status with God is attainable through a special religious experience, formula, or insight.

Mystics view reality as a two-story house. On the bottom are ‘carnal’ Christians, burdened with life. In the upper story are the ‘victorious,’ who have tapped into the formula for living above other Christians. Mystics view Christians as belonging to two camps: the inferior kind and his kind.

Are they real?

Are we suggesting such experiences may not be real? To the contrary. I can accept these believers have had a genuine encounter with God. We need to be filled with the Spirit, work on our sanctification, and practice repentance. The theology they attach to these experiences is another question.

The main problem is these experiences are all partly true...but only *partly*. A half-truth is often more dangerous than a lie. Here’s the irony: **The second story does not exist!**

The New Testament never describes any spiritual experience or formula for attaining a status superior to other Christians. The Bible speaks instead about *growth*.

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. 2 Pet. 3:18

We grow steadily as we apply the simple means of grace God puts at our disposal: the Word, prayer, and fellowship.

Not only is the second story a myth, but the ladders leading to it are merely shadows. One can no more climb closer to God on them than we can climb a shadow. The only ladder provided is Christ alone and simple faith in him.

That is why all these experiences are only temporary. They may be valid encouragement for a while, but we confront the growth process eventually.

Reformed mysticism

It may astonish some that the reformed branch of theology has its own mysticism. One brand is an emphasis on 'living a life of repentance.'

The idea is that if we follow a certain repentance formula, groveling enough in the acknowledgement of our sinfulness, then God will grant us special grace to bump us to the upper story.

The formula is in three steps: First, we recognize our horrible sinfulness. Second, grovel in this until we feel really sorry. Third, pray a sinner's prayer. Result: We will then experience profound joy and live victoriously above other Christians. We will be in the second story.

Where does this idea originate?

Sometimes reformed teachers overemphasize our remaining corruption while virtually excluding the positive identity of the believer. This may stem from the doctrine of total depravity, normally meant to describe the helpless state of the unregenerate.

From this follows a subtle assumption: If we grovel enough before God, he will take pity on us and grant more grace. A problem with this is it makes grace dependent on a human ability to repent adequately.

Do some teachers fear that believers might be lacking in humility? Of *course* we are not humble enough. We aren't *anything* enough.

In one service I attended, the responsive reading included two pages of confession, such as:

People: We acknowledge that we are poor sinners, conceived and born in guilt and in corruption, prone to do evil, unable of ourselves to do any good, who, by reason of our depravity, transgress without end your holy commandments.

People: We confess that we have coveted the possessions and spouses of others; we acknowledge in summary that our whole life is nothing else than sin and transgression of your holy commandments and an inclination toward all evil.

There follows a long sinner's prayer and the assurance of forgiveness.

Spiritual identity theft

What is wrong with the procedure above? Nothing, per se. It is what it leaves out that concerns us.

Which are we? Sinners with grace, or saints with remnants of sin? The book of Ephesians gives the answer. In the first three chapters, we see a glorious description of what we are and have in Christ. The last three chapters exhort us to live worthy of this calling.

The positive is first. Paul declares we are saints and faithful brothers, then on the basis of this indicates we should stop lying, fornicating, squabbling, etc. We are saints with remnants of corruption. We are not sinners with remnants of grace.

Does this mean we need not 'live a life of repentance'? It depends on how we define it. As we read our Bibles daily, pray and engage in fellowship with other believers, we are attentive to the Holy Spirit who brings to the attention of our conscience what the Father wants us to correct. We confess it and go on from there.

An excessive emphasis on our remaining corruption makes grace dependent on our ability to repent properly and be grieved enough. The Pharisee in our heart has spoken again, this time with a quieter voice than a Pentecostal and a more humble expression than a Nazarene. Either way, grace is no longer sovereign.

Finally, we must avoid giving the impression that the essence of the Christian life is forgiveness of sins. Not so. Forgiveness is the first half of the gospel. The core is an imputed righteousness and a new identity as saints.

For those who have come out of Roman Catholicism, the idea of groveling before God probably sounds familiar. If you were a Catholic, did you practice this? Did it do you any good?

So stop 'living a life of repentance' *primarily*. It's like driving a car. We have a windshield and a rearview mirror. Most of our attention is on what is ahead. Occasionally we check the rearview mirror to see where we have been.

Identity cure

Here's a suggestion for aligning our self-concept with Scripture. Take this list below, which comes from the first three chapters of Ephesians, paste it in your Bible, and read it regularly. This is not a mystic formula. It is simply encouragement.

In Christ I am...

- A saint and faithful believer
- Blessed with every spiritual blessing
- Chosen in Christ
- Holy and without blame

- Loved by God
- Predestined as his child
- Adopted by God
- The praise of his glory
- A trophy of his grace
- Redeemed by his blood
- Forgiven
- Partaker of the riches of his grace
- Heir of God
- Sealed with the Spirit
- Alive in Christ
- Seated in Heavenly places
- Saved by grace
- Created for good works
- Heir of the covenant
- Access to the Father
- Fellow citizen with the saints of God
- Member of God's household
- God's dwelling place
- Bold access to the throne of God
- Sealed for redemption
- A child of the light
- A member of Christ's body

Though we still sin, we have a new identity. That's a reason for a lot of joy. So keep on dancing.

From this chapter we learn...

- Christians are saints with remnants of corruption, not sinners with elements of grace.
- Christian movements generally have some element of mysticism.
- Mysticism is the mistaken belief that a particular spiritual experience, formula, or insight will grant a special status with God.
- The problem with all forms of mysticism is that no such special status exists.
- The reformed movement sometimes has its own mysticism that consists in an excessive emphasis on our remaining corruption and need for continual repentance.
- A potential problem with an emphasis on the reformed idea of 'living a life of repentance' is that it makes grace dependent on a human ability to repent properly.

Study questions for Chapter 10

- How does the New Testament express the identity of Christians?
- Since we Christians still sin, what is wrong with identifying ourselves as principally sinners?
- What is mysticism?
- What are some of the problems with mysticism?
- What are a couple of the theological dangers inherent in the reformed idea of ‘living a life of repentance’?

Conclusion

I cannot improve on Easton's brilliant and thorough summary of justification:

Easton's Bible Dictionary: Justification

A forensic term, opposed to condemnation. As regards its nature, it is the judicial act of God, by which he pardons all the sins of those who believe in Christ and accounts, accepts, and treats them as righteous in the eyes of the law, i.e., as conformed to all its demands.

In addition to the pardon of sin, justification declares that all the claims of the law are satisfied in respect of the justified. It is the act of a judge and not of a sovereign. The law is not relaxed or set aside but is declared to be fulfilled in the strictest sense; and so the person justified is declared to be entitled to all the advantages and rewards arising from perfect obedience to the law. (Rom. 5:1-10)

It proceeds on the imputing or crediting to the believer by God himself of the perfect righteousness, active and passive, of his Representative and Surety, Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:3-9). Justification is not the forgiveness of a man without righteousness but a declaration that he possesses a righteousness that perfectly and forever satisfies the law, namely, Christ's righteousness. (2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 4:6-8) The sole condition on which this righteousness is imputed or credited to the believer is faith in or on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith is called a "condition," not because it possesses any merit, but only because it is the instrument, the only instrument by which the soul appropriates or apprehends Christ and his righteousness Rom. 1:17; 3:25, 26; 4:20-22; Phil. 3:8-11; Gal. 2:16 The act of faith which thus secures our justification secures also at the same time our sanctification (q.v.); and thus the doctrine of justification by faith does not lead to licentiousness (Rom. 6:27).

Good works, while not the ground, are the certain consequence of justification (Rom. 6:14).

[Appendix A: Excerpts: International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#)

Justification

...verb, δικαιο, "justification" "to justify," in a legal sense, the declaring just or righteous. In Biblical literature, without denying the real righteousness of a person, is used invariably or almost invariably in a declarative or forensic sense. ...

The perfection of the law of God and the necessity of its perfect observance, if justification is to come by it (Romans 3: 10).

The modern notion of God as a good-natured, more or less nonchalant ruler, to whom perfect holiness is not inexorable, was not that of Paul. If one had indeed kept the law, God could not hold him guilty (Romans 2:13), but such an obedience never existed.

Jesus, not Mary, saints or church doctrine, the only object of faith.

The object of this faith is Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22, etc.), through whom only comes the gift of righteousness and the reigning in life (Romans 5:17), not Mary, not angels, not doctrine, not the church, but Jesus only. This, to be sure, does New Testament exclude God the Father as an object of faith. as the redeeming act of one God is always presupposed (1Corinthians 8:6), but it was the apostolic custom rather to refer repentance to God and faith to Christ (Acts 20:21). But the oneness of God the Father and Christ the Son in a work of salvation is the best guaranty of the Divinity of the latter, both as an objective fact and as an inner experience of the Christian.

The justification being by faith, it is not by works or by love, or by both in one. It cannot be by the former, because they are lacking either in time or amount or quality, nor could they be accepted in any case until they spring from a heart renewed, for which faith is the necessary presupposition. It cannot be by the latter, for it exists only where the Spirit has shed it abroad in the heart (Romans 5:5), the indispensable prerequisite for receiving which is faith. This does not mean that the crown of Christianity is not love, for it is (1Corinthians 13:13); it means only that the root is faith. Nor can love be foisted in as a partial condition of justification on the strength of the word often quoted for that purpose, "faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6). The apostle is speaking here only of those who are already "in Christ," and he says that over against the Galatian believers bringing in a lot of legal observances, the only availing thing is not circumcision or its lack, but faith energizing through love.

Baptism also eliminated

Not only are good works and love removed as conditions or means of justification of the sinner, but baptism is also eliminated. According to Paul, it is the office of baptism, not to justify, but to cleanse, that is, symbolically to set forth the washing away of sin and the entrance into the new life...

IMPUTATION

The word "imputation," according to the Scriptural usage, denotes an attributing of something to a person, or a charging of one with anything, or a setting of something to one's account...

It makes no difference, so far as the meaning of imputation is concerned, who it is that imputes, whether man (1 Sam 22:15) or God (Ps 32:2); it makes no difference what is imputed, whether a good deed for reward (Ps 106:30 f) or a bad deed for punishment (Lev 17:4); and it makes no difference whether that which is imputed is something which is personally one's own prior to the imputation, as in the case above cited, where his own good deed was imputed to Phinehas (Ps 106:30 f), or something which is not personally one's own prior to the imputation, as where Paul asks that a debt not personally his own be charged to him (Philem 1: 18).

In all these cases the act of imputation is simply the charging of one with something. It denotes just what we mean by our ordinary use of the term. It does not change the inward state or character of the person to whom something is imputed. When, for example, we say that we impute bad motives to anyone, we do not mean that we make such a one bad; and just so in the Scripture the phrase "to impute iniquity" does not mean to make one personally bad, but simply to lay iniquity to his charge. Hence, when God is said "to impute sin" to anyone, the meaning is that God accounts such a one to be a sinner, and consequently guilty and liable to punishment.

Similarly, the non-imputation of sin means simply not to lay it to one's charge as a ground of punishment (Ps 32:2). In the same manner, when God is said "to impute righteousness" to a person, the meaning is that He judicially accounts such a one to be righteous and entitled to all the rewards of a righteous person (Rom 4:6,11).

Appendix B: On Early Fathers

A common Roman Catholic objection to *sola fide* is that the early church fathers, up through the 5th century, knew nothing of a forensic justification. Further, they quote extensively from Augustine and others, pointing out their use of the term “merits.”

Buchanan shows the fallacy of these assertions, pointing out how the fathers used the term “*merits*” in a totally different sense than the Catholic church means today. They originally meant “benefit received,” whether deserved or not.

Further, Buchanan quotes from early fathers showing they understood salvation by grace alone, without merits, although they did not use the term “forensic” or “legal.”

Below are extracts from Buchanan’s introductory essay, with quotes. I have done some editing, because the stilted 18th century style makes it hard to read and nearly impossible to translate. I deleting unnecessary clauses, and put any additions of my own in brackets.

.....

THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION: AN OUTLINE OF ITS HISTORY IN THE CHURCH AND OF ITS EXPOSITION FROM SCRIPTURE (1867).

by James Buchanan (1804-1870)

History of the Doctrine in the Times of the Fathers

Augustine, as the great Doctor of Grace, has been singled out [by Roman Catholics] as the advocate of 'moral, and the opponent of 'forensic,' justification.

For this reason, his authority was supposed to afford a conclusive proof of the novelty of the Protestant doctrine. And certainly it would be strange, that he who did so much to establish the doctrine of free grace, should undermine grace, in the matter of our justification.

But before we adopt so improbable a conclusion, we must carefully consider the controversy in which he was then engaged. It was materially different from the subsequent controversy between Rome and the Reformation.

The Pelagians, with whom he was called to contend, admitted the doctrine of Grace in the free remission of sins, while they denied the necessity of efficacious grace for the conversion of the sinner. Their heresy, therefore, did not directly raise the question of a sinner's justification in the sight of God. They believed, that 'there is forgiveness with God;' but they believed also, that man is able of himself 'to repent and turn to God.'

Augustine defended the doctrine of Grace and, in doing so, he established certain great principles which were sufficient to counteract the tendency towards a self-righteous scheme of justification.

These two fundamental principles were clearly taught by Augustine:

First, that works done before faith are not good (splendida peccata). Secondly, that works done after faith, although good, are so imperfect in themselves that they need to be sprinkled with the blood of Christ.

These two principles, when combined with his more general doctrine of free grace, involve the substance of the Protestant doctrine. He affirmed the free grace of God in opposition to the free-will of man, as the fountainhead of a sinner's whole salvation. It was ascribed by Augustine, to the free and unmerited grace of God alone. By establishing this fundamental truth, he laid a firm foundation for the more special doctrine of a free justification by grace.

In this way, and to this extent, Augustine prepared the way for Luther and Calvin, by excluding the merit of man, and exalting the grace of God.

It has been alleged, not only that Augustine knew nothing of a 'forensic' justification by faith, but that he taught the opposite doctrine of a 'moral' justification, by infused or inherent righteousness. This allegation rests mainly on two grounds,--first, the use which he made of the term 'Merits' when he spoke of good works; and secondly, the sense in which he used the term 'justification,' when he spoke of the benefit bestowed by the Gospel.

In regard to the first, it has been conclusively proved by most of our great writers in their controversy with the Romish Church, that Augustine, in common with all the Latin Fathers, used the term 'Merits,' not to denote legal, or even moral desert, but to signify a means of obtaining some blessing.

It was at a later period that the doctrine of Merit, was constructed. But, as used by the Fathers, the term denoted merely that by which benefit was obtained. In this general sense, it was said that we might merit Christ, or merit the Spirit, or merit eternal life; not that we could deserve any one of these inestimable gifts, or that they could ever become due to us in justice.

In this sense, the verb occurs even in the Protestant Confession of Augsburg; but now, when the meaning of the term has been entirely changed, it is not safe to speak of Merits at all.

Further testimonies [From early church Fathers]:

Gregory: I grow in life not by merits, but by pardon and mercy. (Job. lib.9. c.14.)

Augustine:[b.354] Whatsoever God has promised, he has promised to those that are unworthy, that it should not be promised as a reward unto works, but as grace freely given. (Praef. in Ps.109.)

Augustine: [b.354]A Christian must not be lifted up for his merits in this world, because no man here in this life can say he is without sin, whatsoever he has in this life is a gift, not a merit. (Hypogn. cont. Pelag. art.3.)

Ambrose:[b.339] Faith has life eternal, as a good foundation, and good works too, whereby a righteous man is proved in word and deed. (Offic. lib.2. c.2. Good works prove the righteous man, they don't make the man righteous: faith is the foundation of eternal life.)

Bernard of Clairvaux:[b.1090] All our merits are gifts of God, and so a man rather for them is a debtor to God, than God to man. (de annuit. Mar. serm.1.)

Bernard of Clairvaux: [b.1090] Bernard of Clairvaux: Dangerous is the dwelling of them that trust in their merits: dangerous because ruinous. (Psal. Qui Habitat. Ser.1.)

Bernard of Clairvaux:[b.1090] Let other men seek for merit, let us study to find grace: Mary pretends not merit but seeks grace. (serm. nat. Mar.)

Glossary

I have taken the definitions below from three sources: The Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the Encyclopedia Britannica and my own usage relative to the material in the manual. Where the definition is from Merriam-Webster, I have marked it with (MW); from Encyclopedia Britannica, (EB). Unmarked clauses are my own.

active obedience. The term referring to the life Christ led as a human being under the law, on our behalf, in order to fulfill the law's requirement of perfect obedience.

assensus. Latin word referring man's reasoning ability. According to Reformed theology, it is one of the constituents of faith.

Calvin, John. French reformer, 16th century, who immigrated to Switzerland. Calvin was influential for his incisive writings, especially the Institutes of the Christian Religion.

catalyst. An agent that provokes or speeds significant change or action (MW). In Chapter Six, the word is used to describe how reason, combined with a divine promise can be the element to help produce faith.

commutation. A substitution of one form of payment or charge for another (MW). In theology, this means the imputation of our sins to Christ and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us.

condemnation. In theology, usual refers to final judgment in which a sinner is condemned to hell.

Council of Trent. A meeting of Roman Catholic bishops in Trento, Italy in 1545 in response to the Protestant Reformation (EB).

Covenant of Abraham. The name of the agreement between God and Abraham to bless the nations through his descendant (Christ). The New Testament, especially Galatians, describes this covenant as the one to which all Christians belong through faith in Christ.

efficient cause. The agent that performs an action. In discussions on justification, it involves the question, "Who or what actually completes the work of justification?"

essence. In theology, this refers to spiritual substance. Theologians use the word *essence* precisely to avoid the term *substance*, because that term may be misunderstood as referring to something material.

Evangelical. That which has to do with the gospel. Normally referring to conservative Protestants.

experiential. That which is experienced and felt, as opposed to legal and theoretical.

fiducia. Latin word for "trust." Considered by Evangelicals to be an indispensable element of justifying faith. Rejected by Catholics as unnecessary for justification.

Formula of Concord. Collected doctrinal standards of the Lutheran churches, published in

German, 1580 (EB).

imputation. To credit to a person or cause (MW). In theological terms, it refers to the crediting to the account of one person that which belongs to another.

indictment. A formal written statement framed by a prosecuting authority and found by a jury (as a grand jury) charging a person with an offense (MW).

inherent. Essential character of something (MW). In theological writing, it often refers to internal moral characteristics as an integral part of a person's character.

Instrumental Cause. The means by which an agent accomplishes a work. Example: A hammer is the means by which a carpenter drives a nail. The carpenter is the efficient cause. The hammer is the instrumental cause. In theology, instrumental cause deals with the question of what causes the transfer of righteousness or forgiveness to a person.

law. In theological writings, it usually refers to the laws of God as expressed in the Pentateuch.

law of God. Generally refers to the Law of Moses in the Pentateuch. In this manual, I use it principally for the moral law, the 10 Commandments.

mortal sin. In Catholic theology, any serious sin will cause loss of justification. These include, but are not limited to, adultery, murder, and theft.

mystical. Having a spiritual meaning or reality that is neither apparent to the senses nor obvious to the intelligence; involving or having the nature of an individual's direct subjective communion with God or ultimate reality (MW).

noticia. A Latin word for "knowledge" or "data." In theology, it refers to a vital element of faith.

objective. Expressing or dealing with facts or conditions as perceived without distortion by personal feelings, prejudices, or interpretations (MW).

ordo salutis. Order of events in salvation. In Reformed theology, it generally refers to the question of whether regeneration precedes faith.

Osiander, Andrew. German heretic, 1498-1552, who troubled the Lutheran church with a doctrine relating to justification.

Owen, John. Prolific English Puritan writer, 1616-1683, known for his defense of the doctrines of grace.

passive obedience. The submission of Christ, as our substitute, to the penalty of death proscribed by the law of God.

penance. An act of self-abasement, mortification, or devotion performed to show sorrow or

repentance for sin (MW).

Puritan. A member of a 16th- and 17th-century Protestant group in England and New England opposing as unscriptural the ceremonial worship and the government of the Church of England (MW).

reason. The power of comprehending, inferring, or thinking, especially in orderly rational ways (MW).

Reformation. A 16th-century religious movement marked ultimately by rejection or modification of certain Roman Catholic doctrines and practices and the establishment of the Protestant churches (MW).

reformers. Those who participated in a 16th-century religious movement marked ultimately by rejection or modification of some Roman Catholic doctrine and practice and establishment of the Protestant churches (MW).

righteousness. In accord with divine or moral law (MW).

sanctification. The state of growing in divine grace as a result of Christian commitment after baptism or conversion

scapegoat. One that bears the blame for others (MW). The term is taken from the Old Testament custom of symbolically placing the sins of the people on a goat and sending it into the wilderness.”

socinianism. A movement founded by Faustus Socinus of Italy, 1539-1604, which asserted that faith itself is righteousness.

sola fide. Latin for “faith alone Used to describe the Protestant view of justification by faith.

Stancarus. A 16th-century Lutheran theologian who claimed that the divine side of Christ played no role whatsoever in redemption.

subjective. Characteristic of or belonging to reality as perceived rather than as independent of mind (MW). The opposite of objective. In philosophy or theology, it refers to the perception of truth as a state of mind rather than an external reality.

Turretin, Francis. A 17th-century monk from Italy, converted to Protestantism, who fled to Geneva to escape persecution and subsequently became president of the Geneva Academy that Calvin founded a century earlier.

vindicate. To free from allegation or blame; to provide justification or defense for (MW).

works-righteousness. As used by Protestants, the unscriptural notion that one may obtain acceptance with God through personal adherence to divine law, as opposed to faith in Christ.

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This writer claims he is committed to scripture as the basis of Catholicism. He is aggressive and confident. The book has value as documentation for the way Catholicism misuses scripture to justify certain doctrines. It contains some of the most subtle scripture-twisting I have ever encountered and may mislead those unfamiliar with sound biblical hermeneutics. 320 pages.

Berkhof, Louis. *Manual of Christian Doctrine*. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 1979.

An outstanding American theologian of the Christian Reformed Church wrote this outline as an introduction to the study of biblical theology. His analysis of justification as held by respective groups is succinct and clear. 375 pages.

Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1996.

Berkhof has an uncommon talent for conciseness. He deals succinctly and clearly with justification while refuting both Catholicism and Arminianism. For preparing chapter outlines on this subject, it is invaluable. 784 pages.

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The definitive lexicon on Old Testament Hebrew. Though the electronic version is abridged, it is more than sufficient except for the most fastidious scholars.

Britannica Encyclopedia. Britannica Software Version 2002.1.0: New York, NY, 2000.

This abridged software version allows brief overviews but not in-depth studies. Good for historical data.

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The supreme classic of the Reformation period with four hundred pages dedicated to the doctrines of grace. Calvin's treatment of Osiander and Stancarus on justification is superb. 1733 pages.

Catechism of the Catholic Church. Internet version, Second Edition:
<http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc.htm>

This Internet version has the best search utility on the Internet for the *Catechism*. It is fast and works with combined Boolean search criteria. Approximately 600 pages.

Catholic Catechism. Doubleday Publishers: Mechanicsburg, PA, 2003.

The authoritative statement of Roman Catholic doctrine. It is a primary source Catholic writers themselves quote when explaining their viewpoints. 826 pages.

Catholic Encyclopedia. Online Edition by K. Knight, 2003: <http://www.newadvent.org>

This site contains everything about the Catholic Church and its views. The site represents the 15-volume set, available in hardcover. Though some of the theological writing is tedious, with Latin frequently left not translated, it is thorough. Page count indeterminable. 15 volumes.

Council of Trent. Hanover Historical Texts Project: Hanover, IN, 1995.
<http://history.hanover.edu/early/trent.htm>

This council was held by the Roman Catholic Church in 1545 in Trento, Italy, to respond to the Protestant Reformation. It is sometimes called the Anti-Reformation Council. The online version is easy to navigate because the section titles are linked, with a return mode at each section. The search mode is standard, not Boolean, but adequate. Approximately 60 pages.

Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms: Accordance Oaktree Bible Software: Temecula, CA, 1999.

Contains 13 of the most common Reformed confessions in electronic format. Boolean search criteria are available for perusing them together.

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Contains 1,250 articles on theological themes, including bibliographies of influential theologians. 1204 pages.

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The statement of faith of the German Lutheran Church in 1577. This Internet version has the index as links for quick perusal. <http://www.frontiernet.net/~wndlnd/epitome.html#e8>. Approximately 100 pages.

Gingrich, Wilbur. *A Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament.* University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, 1965.

A small lexicon, giving the main meaning of words. Good for looking up a word in a hurry.

241 pages.

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The value of this Greek New Testament is in the font, which is the most legible on the market. The text apparatus at the bottom, as footnotes, is handy also for those interested in manuscript criticism. 203 pages for the dictionary. 918 for the New Testament.

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Hendricksen, William. *New Testament Commentary: Romans*. Baker House: Grand Rapids, MI, 2002.

This Reformed author was one of the best of the twentieth century. His analysis of Romans contains none of the obscurities some writers use in dealing with controversial subjects. His logic is incisive and accurate. 533 pages.

Henry, Matthew. *A Commentary on the Whole Bible. Volume Five*. World Bible Publishers: Iowa Falls, IA, 1985.

This English commentator finished his five-volume set in 1721. It is more pastoral and less scholarly in approach. His comments on the texts relative to justification, however, are clear and outlined adequately. 1739 pages.

International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. 6. Ages Christian Library, Macintosh Version 2.0: New York, NY, 1999.

This ten-volume set is one of the most scholarly and thorough Bible encyclopedias available. The search mode is usable but generally unnecessary because of the logical way it is laid out. 913 pages.

Kistemaker, Simon. *New Testament Commentary: James and Epistles of John*. Baker House: Grand Rapids, MI, 2002

This scholar from Covenant College in Tennessee undertook to complete the commentaries started by the late William Hendricksen. His style is equally clear and without the pedantry of some commentators. He has the courtesy to put technicalities of Greek grammar in sections apart from the main text to avoid tedium. The section on James 2 is adequate but not outstanding. 197 pages.

Latin Minidictionary. Oxford Press: Oxford, England, 1985.

Small dictionary for quick reference, not intended for deep scholarship. 686 pages.
Greek-English Lexicon: Semantic Domains. Oaktree Software: Temecula, CA, 1999.

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Novum Testamentum Graece et Latine. Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: Druck, Germany, 1997.

The Greek is on one side and the Latin Vulgate on the other, facilitating comparison of the respective languages. For the study of Catholic misuse of New Testament words, it is very helpful. 680 pages.

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Owen was an outstanding Puritan scholar, 1616-1683. Owen left little unsaid about justification in this enormous treatise. He refutes every possible argument against the Reformed doctrine of justification. The software version is valuable to search for specifics rapidly. 557 pages

Ramsay, Richard. *Catholics and Protestants: What is the difference?* Unilit Publishers: Miami, FL, 2002.

This work by Dr. Ramsay of the Logoi Institute is less polemic than most works written by Protestants about Catholicism. The intent is comparison, with a view to influencing a Catholic reader. 251 pages.

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Evidently the translation has not been updated since 1851, which explains the archaic tone of the English. The print is small due to the large size of the volume. 1130 pages.

Shaw, Robert. *Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Accordance Bible Software, Version 4.1. Oaktree Software, Inc.: Temecula, CA, 1999.

Shaw's commentary on the WCF was completed in May, 1845. The redundant style of the 19th century makes this work sound pedantic. Some portions are eloquent and well outlined. The software version has all scripture references as links, which makes perusal easy. Also, the

search mode can find topics quickly, without reference to the index. Approximately 200 pages.

Smalling, Roger. *Unlocking Grace*. Deovolente Publishers: Los Alamos, NM, 2002

This book is the English translation of *Si, Jesús*, published in 1994 in Spanish. It introduces the important doctrines of the Reformation in a non-polemic style. 180 pages.

Sproul, R.C. *Faith Alone*. Baker House Publishers: Grand Rapids, MI, 2002.

In my opinion, this is the best book on justification in today's market. With Sproul's inimitable style, he makes an old doctrine come to life. His documentation is excellent. 219 pages.

Sproul, R.C. *Justified by Faith Alone*. Crossway Books: Wheaton, IL, 1999.

A booklet summarizing Sproul's larger work, *Faith Alone*, with clarifications on the difference between Catholic and Reformed views of justification. A good primer. 48 pages.

Thayer, Henry. *Greek-English Lexicon*. Archa Publishers: Lafayette, IN, 1979.

The most thorough and scholarly lexicon I have found. The print is small. Knowledge of New Testament Greek is necessary. 722 pages.

Turretin, Francis. *Justification*. P&R Publishing: Philipsburg, NJ, 1994.
115 pages.

This 17th-century Italian scholar eventually became president of the Geneva Academy, founded a century earlier by Calvin. He was known for his penetrating intellect and pithy comments, which sliced through theological error. This book is a selection from his larger work, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*.

Wenham, John. *The Elements of New Testament Greek*. Cambridge University Press: London, England, 1982.

The best self-teaching primer on New Testament Greek on the market, in my opinion. I began my studies of Greek in the mid-70's using Wenham. It avoids the tedium of Machen. 268 pages.

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This publication contains the original English with modern English in parallel. Useful for group studies to introduce the Confession to laymen. 65 pages.

Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies. Hendrickson's Publishers: Peabody, MA, 1999.

Endnotes

¹. Luther did not actually say these words. In his commentary on Ps.130, he said, "This article standing, the Church stands. This article falling, the Church falls." This statement is a bit exaggerated because the Church can fall in other ways than erring on justification. Yet it summarizes his views on the importance of justification. The work where Luther said this has never been translated from German. For those interested, it is:
Luther, Martin. *Luther Werke, Weimar Ausgabe*. Herman Boehlau: Weimar, Germany, 1930, Vol.40, p.130.

². Sproul, *Faith Alone*, p.16.

³. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Two Volumes*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1964 2:37 (3.11.11).

⁴. Elwell, Walter, Editor. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Baker House: Grand Rapids, MI, 1984. p.594.

⁵. The *Septuagint*, sometimes abbreviated as LXX, is the Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures. The apostles quoted from the LXX when expounding Old Testament texts.

⁶. Louw&Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon: Semantic Domains*. Oakware Software: Temecula, CA, 1999. Search Mode "just."

⁷. Louw&Nida. Search Mode *dikaiao*.

⁸. Thayer, Henry. *Greek-English Lexicon*. Archa Publishers: Lafayette, IN, p.150.

⁹. Gingrich's Shorter Lexicon, p.53.

¹⁰. United Bible Societies Greek-English Dictionary p.46.

¹¹. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary*, p.593.

¹². *Calvin's Institutes*, Book 3, Chapter 11.

¹³. Such as *eisago*: bring or put into. Or, *diikneomai*: penetrate (Heb.4:11).

¹⁴. *Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies*. Hendrickson's Publishers: Peabody, MA, 1999. p.256

¹⁵. NIV=credit to; ASV=reckon; NKJV=account.

¹⁶. In my book, *Unlocking Grace*, I use an illustration of a dump truck loading cement into an empty foundation; the cement representing the righteousness of Christ. This illustration is intended to describe the difference between justification as an act versus sanctification as a process.

Someone said this illustration could cause confusion because it could be taken as infusing something into the soul of the believer. I can see how it could be taken that way. This is not my intent. The illustration serves to distinguish between final action and process, not between imputation and infusion.

¹⁷. *Greek-English Dictionary*. United Bible Societies Greek New Testament&Lexicon. London, 1995. p.108

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18. Louw&Nida: Search mode, *logizomai*.
 19. *Thayer's*, p.379
 20. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary*.p.554.
 21. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*. Vol.3, p.145.
 22. *Ibid*, p.179.
 23. Owen, John. *The Doctrine of Justification*. Ages Christian Library Software: Albany, Oregon, 1999, p.70.
 24. *Ibid*, p.315.
 25. Encyclopedia. Britannica Software Version 2002.1.0: New York, New York, 2000. Search mode *Osiander*.
 26. *Formula of Concord*. FrontierNet.com: 2004.
<http://www.frontiernet.net/~wndlnd/epitome.html#e8>
 27. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary*. p.809.
 28. An excellent web article on this point by a Lutheran is, *The Concordia Lutheran: Osiander Controversy*.
http://www.concordialutheranconf.com/CLO_articleDTM_may1996.html
 29. Quoted in *Evangelical Dictionary*, p.734
 30. *Institutes*, Book III, Cap.VIII, Art.8.
 31. Matthew Henry. *A Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Vol.5, p.28-29.
 32. *Institutes*, Book III, Chapter XI, Art.12 (Battles, p.742).
 33. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*. p.515.
 34. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*. Vol.3, p.182 Stancarus.
 35. Article III of the Formula of Concord states: Even though Christ had been conceived and born without sin...and had fulfilled all righteousness in his human nature alone, and yet had not been true and eternal God, this obedience and suffering of his human nature could not be imputed to us for righteousness....Our righteousness rests not upon one or the other nature, but upon the entire person of Christ, who as God and man is our righteousness. (935,55f).
A good commentary on this may be seen at:
<http://www.wls.wels.net/library/Essays/Authors/k/KoschnitzkeConcord/KoschnitzkeConcord.htm>
 36. The *Evangelical Dictionary* elaborates this point on p.953.
 37. I enlarge on this point in my essay, *Sensible Faith*, at:
<http://www.geocities.com/joyfullyserving/Essays/SensibleFaith.html>
On television, we frequently see people mentioning the word *faith* in the most ambiguous and mystical terms.
 38. *Britannica Encyclopedia*. Standard Edition CD-Rom, Version 2002. Search Mode *Socius*.
 39. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p.515.
 40. This illustration is taken from Sproul's book, *Faith Alone*, p.74-75.
 41. *Institutes*, Book 3, chapter 14, article 17.
Or, *Institutes*, Ages Library Software, p.863,

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42. Ages Library Software, pp.9,167-169
43. Turretin, Francis. *Justification*. Presbyterian and Reformed Publications: Philipsburg, NJ, 1994.
Francis Turretin was a 17th century converted monk from Italy who fled to Geneva to escape persecution and subsequently became President of the Geneva Academy that Calvin founded a century earlier. He brilliantly refuted the notion that faith has inherent merit.
44. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p.527.
45. A Catechism produced by the Christian Reformed Church in 1563. . . *Creeds, Confessions and Catechisms*: Accordance Oaktree Bible software: Temecula, CA, 1999.
46. *Westminster Confession of Faith: Modern English Study Version*, Great commission Publications, Suwanee, GA 1999 Chapter 11, Art.2.
47. Ibid, p.79.
48. Turretin, p.75.
49. Ibid, p.76.
50. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol.III, p.169.
51. Wenham, John. *The Elements of New Testament Greek*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, England, 1982. pp.69-70.
52. A grammar search using Accordance Bible Software, Greek mode, confirms this.
53. Owen, *Justification*, pp.167-169
54. Turretin, *Justification*, p.79.
55. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p.522.
56. Calvin, *Institutes*. Book III, Chap. XI, Art.17.
57. Turretin, *Justification*, p.77&83
58. Turretin, *Justification*, pp.73 &83.
59. Sproul, *Faith Alone*. p.75.
60. For a deeper study on this point, note the following verses: Eph.4:13; Titus 1:1-2; 2Pet.1:2; 3:18.
61. Sproul, *Faith Alone*, p.80.
62. Sproul, *Faith Alone*, p.188.
63. Westminster Confession: Modern Study Version. p.49.
64. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary*, p.594.
65. Calvin, *Institutes*, 2:115 (3.17.12)
66. Hendricksen's Commentaries, *Epistle of James*, p.87-88.
67. Berkhof, Systematic Theology. p.516.
68. *Catholic Catechism*: <http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc.htm>
69. "Semantic" means, *relating to meaning in language*. Webster's Dictionary Search Mode *semantic*. I've seen this term used in philosophical essays. The first time I heard it used in a theological sense was by Francis Schaeffer at L'Abri in 1968, to describe liberal theology.

Usages can be found by Internet search mode. An example:
<http://minervacognitive.haifa.ac.il/Hamutal/sld006.htm>

70. See *Catholic Catechism. Justification*, for an extensive Catholic explanation of justification, which documents this entire section.

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08573a.htm>

71. *Catholic Catechism*: <http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc.htm>

72. "Semantic" means, *relating to meaning in language*. *Webster's Dictionary Search Mode semantic*. I've seen this term used in philosophical essays. The first time I heard it used in a theological sense was by Francis Schaeffer at L'Abri in 1968, to describe liberal theology. Usages can be found by Internet search mode. An example:
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73. *Catholic Encyclopedia*: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen>

74. *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford Press: London, England, 1985.

75. *Ibid*.

76. *Catholic Encyclopedia: The Process of Justification*.

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08573a.htm>

77. *Catholic Catechism, Code No.2019: Justification includes the remission of sins, sanctification, and the renewal of the inner man.*

78. Armstrong, Dave. *Biblical Overview of Justification and Salvation*. Web site:<http://ic.net/~erasmus/RAZ52.htm>

79. *Catholic Encyclopedia: The Process of Justification*.

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08573a.htm>

80. Council of Trent, Session VI, Chapter VII.

81. Turretin, *Justification*, p.59.

82. Turretin, *Justification*, p.4.

83. *Catholic Catechism, Code No.2019: Justification includes the remission of sins, sanctification, and the renewal of the inner man.*

Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Computer Edition, New York, 2000: Search mode *Apotheosis*.

84. *Catholic Catechism, Code No.1999*.

85. *Catholic Encyclopedia, Grace*: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06701a.htm>

86. *Catholic Encyclopedia: The Process of Justification*.

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08573a.htm>

87. *Catholic Encyclopedia. Controversies on Grace*:

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06701a.htm>

88. *Catholic Catechism, Code No.1999*.

89. *Catholic Encyclopedia. Search Mode "Merits"*:

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10202b.htm>

90. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, Computer Edition, New York, 2000: Search mode *salutary*.

91. *Agnes Christian Library*, Adobe Version, 1999. Both Calvin and Luther spoke this way. A search mode of these authors reveals dozens of examples.

⁹². Fr. Paul O'Sullivan, *Catholic Pages.com*: <http://www.catholic-pages.com/life/suffering.asp>

⁹³. Catholic Encyclopedia, The Protestant Doctrine of Justification,

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08573a.htm>

⁹⁴ Durrell, Gerald. *Bafut Beagles*. Viking Press, London, England. 1981

⁹⁵ 1Corinthians 15:56

⁹⁶ The New Testament repeats these commands in various forms. The student is welcome to study this for himself.

⁹⁷ Others are Psalmody: The notion that only Psalms should be sung in public worship, not hymns or choruses. Theonomy: The notion that Old Testament judicial law should be imposed on society and that Christians should work toward this.

⁹⁸ This view is held by Presbyterians and is taught in chapter 21 of the Westminster Confession. It was the position espoused by the English puritans who dominated the Westminster assembly. We may call this the Puritan view, although doing so irritates Presbyterians.

⁹⁹ Seventh Day Adventists are free worship on Saturday as long as they do not condemn those who worship on Sunday.

¹⁰⁰ This began in Toronto Canada in 1994 and spread rapidly to other countries. A good exposé is found at: <http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/inquirers/toronto.aspx>

¹⁰¹ 1Cor. 8:9; 10:29; Gal. 2:4; 1Pe. 2:16

¹⁰² A paraphrase of a comment by Greg Hauenstein, President of Miami International Seminary, Oct, 2004.

¹⁰³ I find some Christians object to this statement, because they think of sin as specific acts rather than a state of being. I remind them of the command, "Be perfect, even as your father in heaven is perfect." If we are not perfect, then we are sinning all the time. We are, of course, forgiven all the time as well. Christians who do not consider themselves sinners, either have a very low view of God, or a very high view of themselves.