

Justification

(1) Justification is a *verdict*

- *illustration*: at end of trial, verdict rendered | legal declaration
- to be justified is to be declared righteous

We all need justification | we all need a verdict

- Harold Abrams, “I have 10 seconds to justify my whole existence”

(2) What is our justification based on?

- good news of gospel – not based on our moral performance

Romans 3:20-22

²⁰ For **by works of the law no human being will be justified** in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. ²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – ²² **the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ** for all who believe.

Therefore, we are justified sinners!

- Martin Luther – *simul justus et peccatur*
- “simultaneously justified and sinful” | illus: Charlotte’s Web

Luke 18:9-14

⁹ Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, **this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other.**”

Galatians 2:16

We know that a **person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ**, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

(3) Justification is *double imputation*

- “impute” – to credit or attribute | *illustration*: account ledger

We typically think that the gospel is only single imputation

- our sins are imputed to Christ on cross
- but that would not be enough | “gospel is a second chance”
- *illustration*: governor pardons criminal

The gospel is double imputation

- our sins are imputed to Christ
- *and* Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us

2 Corinthians 5:21

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Illustration: Gattaca

(4) What is role of faith? | faith is empty hand that receives the gift

Romans 4:1-3

¹ What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham **believed** God, and it was **counted to him as righteousness.**”

(5) The dispute with Roman Catholicism

- this is the central conflict between Protestantism and Catholicism

James 2:14 - 26

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also **faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.**

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder! ²⁰ Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father **justified by works** when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; ²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” – and he was called a friend of God.

²⁴ You see that **a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.**

²⁵ And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

²⁶ For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

“Not by faith alone”

- distinction between “dead faith” and “true faith”

“A person is justified by works”

- good works is not basis of our justification, but the result

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ 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.

Catechism of the Catholic Church (#1990)

“Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man. Justification detaches man from sin which contradicts the love of God, and purifies his heart of sin.”

Westminster Confession of Faith (chapter 10, section 1)

Those whom God effectually calls, He also freely justifies; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.

Notes

Introduction

- justification is doctrine on which church stands or falls
- if don't understand justification – don't understand gospel

(1) Justification is a verdict

- legal sense | suppose – on trial for murder, defendant
- prosecution presents case; defense presents case – verdict
- verdict is legal declaration of guilt or innocence

- justification is verdict
- to be justified is to be declared “righteous”

What is righteousness?

- moral goodness; holiness | think in terms of morality

- *secular people* – eyes glaze over | I don't care about morality
- don't care about being “righteous” | religious overtone

Show – righteousness is broader concept realize

- Romans 3:23 – “for all have sinned and fall short of glory of God”
- Paul describes righteousness as a glory

- lot more relevant than people realize
- righteousness – significance, worth, accomplishment
- therefore, everyone needs justification

Classic example – Chariots of Fire

- 1924 Paris Olympics, story of Harold Abrams, competing 100m
- end of movie, in training room with coach, full anxiety
- “I have 10 seconds to justify my whole existence”

- “justify” – is talking about righteousness in moral sense?
- talking about worth as human being
- end of race – receive verdict | either glory or worthless

We all need this verdict *from outside*

- because can't give it to ourselves | Stuart Smalley
- looks into mirror – good enough, smart enough, people like you!
- doesn't work | only delusional people and own voice not enough
- you need an authoritative voice from outside – affirm worth

(2) What is our justification based on?

In trial setting, as criminal defendant – what verdict based on?

- the evidence
- either – have surveillance footage of plunging knife into victim
- or – irrefutable proof, at time murder, another place
- Harold Abrams – verdict is based on athletic performance

If that is case – then we are doomed

- God is judge | knows everything – what do, secret thoughts
- weighs evidence against perfect standard of righteousness – guilty

But good news of gospel

- our verdict (justification) is not based on moral performance
- I want realize how strange and counter-intuitive this is

Back criminal trial

- imagine defendant is clearly guilty of murder | evidence irrefutable
- but, at end of trial, judge renders verdict – innocent
- that's good news of gospel | Romans 3:20-23 is most significant v.

Romans 3:20-22

²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. ²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

“works of the law”

- deeds of obedience to law; good deeds; moral performance

“through the law comes knowledge of sin”

- when understand law, try obey – realize sinful, fall short

“righteousness of God”

- verdict of righteousness; declaration of righteousness

“manifested apart from the law” | what is that saying?

- what is our justification *not* based on; what *is* based on?
- not based – works of law, performance | based on – Christ
- faith, not obedience!

Therefore – justified sinners!

- this is extraordinarily strange and scandalous | unthinkable paradox
- why is this combination so bizarre and crazy?
- criminal trial – “innocent murderer”

- Luther – *simul justus et peccator* | simultaneously justified and sinful
- in actuality, deed and evidence – criminal | by verdict – innocent

Luke 18:9-14 ⁹ Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ // ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other.”

Pharisee – looking for verdict

- presents God with evidence – fasts, tithes, abstains sexual sins
- looking to moral record – based justification on works of law
- like a good defense attorney – lays out supporting evidence

Tax collector

- basically, gangster | shake-down artist, extracting exorbitant funds
- what is his case? | doesn’t have case, pleads for mercy

Jesus’ parable is bombshell

- deepest instincts is base our justification on our moral performance
- two men – one is holy man, religious teacher | notorious criminal
- both looking for verdict | criminal justified, good man is not
- why? | Pharisee looked to his moral performance, works of law
- tax collector who pleaded only for mercy of God

Galatians 2:16

We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

“We know a person is not justified by works of the law”

- we receive justification (verdict) not based on performance

“but through faith in Jesus Christ”

- faith is empty hand receives gift | posture of beggar

Illustration – Charlotte’s Web

- Wilbur is pig and eventually slaughtered | Charlotte decides save life
- weave spider webs with words – apply to Wilbur
- first web – “some pig” | attracts huge crowd and attention
- second word – “terrific” | Wilbur, “I’m not terrific, just average”
- Charlotte – doesn’t matter whether feel terrific, all matters what I write

I’m done with lesson!

- everything else is just filling out details

(3) Justification is double imputation

- impute – credit or attribute | accounting term | trans – ‘to count’

Illustration

- accounting ledger – two accounts: A (\$100) and B (0)
- to impute – to credit account B with \$100
- imputation is merely declaration, to credit
- nothing whether Person B actually earned money, belongs to B
- let’s say, dishonest accountant | B is friend, credit funds to B

We typically think of gospel as single imputation

- two accounts: you owe \$1 million | God imputes debt to Christ
- so that on cross, Christ settles debt | pays penalty for sin
- that’s not enough!

Illustration – suppose you are criminal in prison

- governor decides pardon, erase criminal record | commutes sentence
- so criminal is out of jail, record is expunged – is criminal home free?
- no, criminal is out of prison – but what does have to do now?
- still has make it in society | get a job, good citizen, keep nose clean
- governor’s pardon is not enough for a good life
- single imputation is not enough our ultimate happiness and well-being
- back in Garden – without guilt, but facing long climb of righteousness

The gospel is a “second chance”

- implied, single imputation | debt paid, but now God gives another shot
- now, go and live a life of holiness and obedience | go earn \$1 million
- you messed up | now, you got a second chance at life

Gospel is double imputation

- illus: Christ is credited with debt | you credited with \$1 million
- illus: not only governor pardon, but gives new identity
- millionaire, medal of honor winner, everywhere – salute
- that is gospel! | double imputation

I want you to be uncomfortable

- because if truly understand this doctrine – scandalous, offensive
- natural response – so doesn’t matter how live? might as well sin all want
- because justification has nothing to do with who are, what do
- justification doesn’t mean internally, realistically true – just declaration

Many people describe justification as “legal fiction”

Illustration

- failing school – students aren’t learning, teachers hate, principal drugs
- state school inspector comes, evaluates – clearly deserves an ‘F’ rating
- but suppose principal gives bribe \$10,000
- inspector rewrites report | gives school an ‘A’ rate
- that is justification
- unless you can say, “that’s wrong” | don’t understand justification
- your justification has nothing to do with you | no merit, no record
- in fact, entirely contrary to evidence | contrary to reality

Double-imputation explains why Christ lived 30 years

- when kid, used to ask, “why didn’t Jesus just come and die?”
- because Jesus, through his life, earning for us a moral record
- every deed, every thought, every moment – just beauty of his life
- everything he did is credited to us

Do you know how powerful this is?

- in your darkest moments, when hit rock-bottom, mired in sin
- that’s when doctrine of justification matters most
- because sins tell you – you’re lost, verdict is death
- all of us continually default back to justification based on record
- that’s how we feel good about ourselves – look at lives, I’m good
- but when at worst – justification says, “verdict is righteous” in Christ

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

“to be sin for us”

- our sins are imputed to Christ

“we become the righteousness of God”

- Christ’s righteous record to imputed to us

That’s double imputation

Gattaca

- dystopic world in which babies are genetically engineered
- main character – Ethan Hawke
- part of underclass conceived normal way – parents had sex
- genetic flaws, predispositions and limitations
- locks out of most jobs | future, all jobs determined genetic record

Ethan Hawke’s greatest dream, deepest desire become *astronaut*

- you need impeccable genetic record
- that’s ends up happening – becomes janitor space center | closest
- one day, he’s presented with opportunity
- world in which everything determined by genetic record
- underground market for genetic record exceptional people
- character Jude Law, injured accident, paralyzed from waist down
- Jude Law is crème of crop – he’s 99.99 percentile / elite of elite
- sells his genetic code to Ethan Hawke

Scene where Ethan Hawke being *interviewed* for position

- take a urine sample – shows 99.99 percentile
- interviewer – “you’re accepted” | what about interview?
- simply because of Jude Law’s genetic record, Ethan Hawke is in
- because they think Ethan Hawke is Jude Law – he’s in

That’s great *picture of justification*

- Ethan Hawke doesn’t have to perform – that’s it, that’s interview

(4) What is the role of faith?

- faith is not a meritorious work but empty hand that receive the gift
- faith is instrument of justification but not grounds or basis
- Christ is grounds of our justification, not faith

Romans 4:1-3

¹ What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”

Quick quiz – where in passage do we see word imputation?

- “counted to him as righteousness” | other translation, “credited”
 - Abraham received verdict of righteousness – through faith
-

Often hear – justification is when “made righteous”

- no – it’s we are “declared righteous”
- but what’s the problem with saying “made righteous”
- “made” implies a process | “my coach made me a good bowler”
- “made” implies actual, inner reality – made into something
- but justification is a declaration | verdict
- suppose terrible bowler, but bowling association president:
“I declare you the greatest bowler in the world”

(5) The dispute with Roman Catholicism

- this is material break for why the Protestant Reformation happened

What is the Catholic view on justification?

- they believe in justification | they believe it is a verdict
- on what grounds do we receive verdict of righteousness?

- they believe necessity of faith | believe in necessity of grace
- when believe, receive grace – jump-starts process, of holy life
- receive sacraments, attend mass, do good works – end of life, verdict

- justification occurs, not beginning of Christian life, but at end
- after sanctification | for Catholics, justification is not legal fiction
- but verdict is based on actual evidence of righteousness
- very crudely – ‘justified by faith + works’

Catechism of the Catholic Church (#1990)

Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man. Justification detaches man from sin which contradicts the love of God, and purifies his heart of sin.

Catholic Church – our verdict is ultimately based on good works

- this is huge | this is nothing less than destruction of gospel
- rallying cry of Reformation – “justified by faith alone”

James 2

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

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James is talking about two kinds of faith

- v. 18 – “you have faith and I have works” | contrasting 2 kinds of faith
- in early church, people – “faith alone” | distortion of Paul
- “all you need is faith; now I can live any way I want”

- James is confronting that error
- v. 17 – “so also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead”
- dead faith versus true faith (which always accompanied by good works)
- true faith will always produce fruit
- Luther – “we are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone”

- but James is not saying – justified by good works
- think about tree | fruit evidence tree alive, but not source of tree’s life
- not justified by works, but works is evidence of justified

- but v. 24 – “a person is justified by works and not by faith alone”
- speaking in short-hand | “justified [and evidenced] by works”