

**Fundamentals, Study 11: Justification (Tit 3:4-7)**

by BS Poh

o A person who repents and believes in Jesus Christ is, at that instant, justified before God.

1. *Justification* is a legal term. It is the declaration of a judge that the accused is not guilty. The accused is accepted as righteous, instead. The teaching of the Bible is that God planned from eternity the justification of His people, Christ died and rose again for their justification, and they are actually justified upon faith in Christ. That God decreed the justification of His people from eternity is not difficult to understand. If He planned for the salvation of His people from eternity, that salvation would include justification.<sup>1</sup> This should not be confused with the “eternal justification” taught by men like John Gill, John Brine, and Abraham Kuyper, who claimed that God pronounced the elect righteous before the foundation of the world (1. Gal. 3:8; 1 Pet 1:2; Rom 8:30)

2. The *ground* (or reason) for justification is the righteousness of Christ. To *impute* is to reckon to, to ascribe to, to count as. Justification is achieved by God imputing to the believer the two aspects of Christ’s righteousness, namely, His *active obedience* to the whole law and His *passive obedience* in death.<sup>2</sup> Christ's righteousness is not infused or absorbed into the person. Rather, it is considered his legally so that he is pardoned and regarded as righteous. (2. Phil 3:8-9)

3. The *means* (or instrument) of justification is faith in Christ. The person who is effectually called will repent of his sins and trust in Christ for salvation. He is personally justified when the Holy Spirit applies Christ to him, giving him faith.<sup>3</sup> A *double imputation* takes place. First, the person’s sins are regarded as taken away by Christ on the cross. Second, Christ’s righteousness is regarded as given to him. In that way, his sins are forgiven by God and He is accepted as righteous by God.<sup>4</sup> Repentance and faith are not produced by the person. Instead, they are gifts of God.<sup>5</sup> (3. Tit 3:4-7; 4. 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:24; 5. Rom. 3:28; Eph. 2:8-9; Rom 5:17; Acts 11:18)

4. This faith is never alone in the person justified but is accompanied by all the other graces (or qualities) of a true Christian, e.g. love, joy, peace, gentleness, self-control.<sup>6</sup> The person will be full of loving gratitude to God. He will humbly live to please God. He will love to make God known to others. The person is not justified by good works, but good works will be the evidence that he is “justified by grace through faith.” The doctrine of “justification by faith, in Christ, alone” has been called “the article by which a church stands or falls”. It is the core of the gospel.<sup>7</sup> The Roman Catholic Church errs by perverting this teaching. (6. Gal 5:6, 22; James 2:17-26; 7. Rom 3:28; 1 Cor 2:2; Gal 1:6-9.)

5. Justification is a once for all act by which the elect receive forgiveness of sins, and eternal life, from God.<sup>8</sup> The teaching of Karl Barth (1886-1968), an influential Neo-Orthodox theologian (emphasising subjective experience over against objective truth), is that justification is not a once for all act but goes hand in hand with sanctification. In this, he is followed by the modern view of the New Perspective on Paul (NPP). The right teaching is that all sins - whether past, present, or future - are forgiven when the elect are justified. They can never lose their justification but they may

fall under God's fatherly displeasure because of their sins.<sup>9</sup> When that happens God will withdraw His smile and blessings from them, and chastise them by various trials, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, ask for pardon, and renew their walk of faith with Him. The believers in the Old Testament period were justified in the same way, although their faith was upon the Saviour who had yet to come.<sup>10</sup> (8. Matt 6:12; 1 John 1:7-9; John 10:28; 9. Ps. 89:31-33; Heb. 12:5-11; 10. Gal 3:9; Rom. 4:22-24.)

= Don't trust your own righteousness. Seek peace with God through Christ alone!

### **Review Questions**

1. What is the basic meaning of *justification*?
2. When did God decree the justification of His people?
3. What is the *ground* of justification?
4. What two aspects of Christ's righteousness are imputed to His people?
5. What is the *means* of justification?
6. When is a person personally justified?
7. Explain "double imputation".
8. State the relationship between justification and good works.
9. What has the doctrine of justification by faith been called?
10. State the nature of justification as opposed to the wrong views of Karl Barth and the NPP.

### **Assignment/Discussion**

Contrast "justification by faith" and "justification by works" in the experience of Paul in any of these passages: Rom. 6:15-7:6; Gal. 3:10-29; Col. 2:11-23; Phil. 3:1-11.

### **Memory Passage (Rom 3:21-24)**

21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

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