

The word Catholic. Is a transliteration of the Greek *katholikos*, meaning “throughout the whole.”

- This was the meaning in early settings, Ignatius “Wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church.”
- And it’s appearance in the Apostle’s Creed. The universality of the church is the reference.
- Towards the end of the second century a second meaning emerges when heresy becomes a menace and catholic becomes the equivalent of orthodoxy.
- In Reformation times the word became an identifier of those churches that adhered to the papacy in contrast to those groups who identified Protestant causes.
- The designation Roman catholic came about with the controversy between Rome and the Anglican Church. Anglican insisted on it’s right linking it with the ancient apostolic church. Rome’s claim was based on organizational continuity (churches should not be regarded as properly catholic unless they submitted to the government of the Roman hierarchy.

Justification

God pardons and accepts believing sinners. This is essential in determining if that religion is teaching salvation and acceptance on what the person does or on the works of Jesus Christ.

The doctrine of justification determines the whole character of Christianity as a religion of grace and faith.

- It defines the saving significance of Christ’s life and death by relating both to God’s law.
- It displays God’s justice in condemning and punishing sin, his mercy in pardoning and accepting sinners, and his wisdom in exercising both attributes harmoniously together through Christ.
- It makes clear what faith is, Christ atoning substitutionary sacrifice, and trust in him alone for righteousness.
- It explains all the hints and prophecies and instances of salvation in the OT.

Biblical meaning of justify (*dikaioō*) - someone is not liable for punishment and entitled to all the privileges due to those who have kept the law.

This is a doctrinal difference. It is a forensic term, denoting a judicial act of administering the law by declaring a verdict of acquittal, and so excluding all possibility of condemnation.

Has the Catholic church made any doctrinal statements on Justification since Trent?

1. Catechism of the Catholic Church (revised 1997)

This is the most authoritative modern summary of Catholic teaching.

- It reaffirms Trent’s framework, It avoids polemical language used during the Reformation era but keeps the same doctrinal substance.

2. Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999)

Between the **Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation**. Key points: States a “**consensus in basic truths**” about justification.

3. Modern Papal Teaching

Popes since Vatican II have reiterated justification themes, but **no new doctrinal decree on justification has replaced Trent**. The Catholic Church still considers Trent’s teaching authoritative.

What the Council of Trent Was Responding to in the Reformation

During the Protestant Reformation, figures like Martin Luther and others emphasized several teachings that the Catholic Church saw as errors or distortions of the historic faith. The Council of Trent’s decree on justification responded to these, condemning them as doctrinal errors:

The Council of Trent’s Decree on Justification.

1. Justification Begins with God’s Grace

- Humanity is fallen and cannot justify itself.
- The initiative belongs entirely to God.
- Grace comes through Christ’s atoning work — not human effort.

Key idea: No one can earn the beginning of salvation.

2. Prevenient (preceding) Grace Enables Faith and Repentance

- God gives grace that awakens and draws sinners.
- Humans must respond — they are not forced.
- The person cooperates with grace through: Faith, Repentance, Turning to God

This was Trent’s way of affirming grace while maintaining human responsibility.

3. Justification Is Both Forgiveness and Inner Renewal

Trent rejects justification as *only* a legal declaration.

Instead, justification includes:

- Forgiveness of sins
- Being made righteous inwardly
- Spiritual regeneration
- Sanctification

In Catholic teaching, justification and sanctification are closely united.

4. Faith Is Necessary — But Not Faith Alone

- Faith is the beginning and foundation of justification.

- However, Trent teaches: Justification is not by “faith alone” in the Protestant sense. Love and obedience are part of the justified life.
 - Faith must be: Living, Formed by love, Expressed through obedience.

5. The Role of the Sacraments

- Baptism is described as the instrumental cause of justification.
- It is the ordinary means by which justification is received.
- The sacraments continue to nourish of dispense grace afterward.

6. Good Works After Justification

- Good works do not earn initial justification.
- But works: Increase righteousness and Are rewarded by God’s grace

Trent says believers can truly grow in righteousness.

7. The Possibility of Losing Justification

- A justified person can fall from grace through mortal sin.
- Restoration is possible through repentance and confession.

8. Assurance of Salvation

- Trent rejected the idea of absolute, infallible assurance apart from special revelation.
- Believers may have hope and confidence in God’s mercy — but not presumed certainty.
- According to Catholic teaching, any Christian who dies in God’s grace and friendship but is still imperfectly purified of venial sins or the temporal punishment due to forgiven sins goes to Purgatory.

The Council of Trent explicitly rejected the Reformers’ teaching that a sinner is justified by faith alone.

Catholic teaching thus frames justification as both legal forgiveness and actual transformation of the sinner — not merely an external declaration of righteousness.

This was in direct opposition to what many Reformers were articulating — that in justification Christ’s perfect righteousness is credited to believers, apart from any works or infused righteousness. Trent saw this as a misunderstanding of how grace works in a Christian’s life.

Main issues Trent refuted:

- Rejection that additional grace was need for Justification.
- Justification by faith alone without cooperation of love and obedience.
- The belief that once justified, a person cannot fall from grace.
- The notion that the righteousness of Christ is imputed (credited) but not infused into the believer. The idea that justification is merely a forensic declaration without inner renewal

Trent taught instead: justification is both the forgiveness of sins and the inward sanctification and renewal of the soul by the Holy Spirit — a process of being made righteous. Trent Rejected “Faith Alone” and Forensic Only Justification

How Justification Is Defined

Issue	Catholic Teaching (Trent / CCC)	Baptist Faith & Message 2000
Basis of Justification	God’s grace through Christ’s merit. Justification involves the infusion of grace that renews the sinner innerly — not merely a declaration. A person becomes actually righteous by grace.	God’s gracious and full acquittal of sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings peace and favor with God.
Role of Faith	Faith is essential and the beginning of salvation, but it is never “alone” — it is living and works through love.	Faith is central and personal; justification is received through repentance and faith in Christ.
Role of Works	Good works, performed in grace, cooperate with justification and are part of the believer’s growth in righteousness. Trent declares that justification is increased through works done in grace.	Good works are the fruit and evidence of saving faith, but justification itself is not based on works. The text does not explicitly revisit the <i>sola fide</i> formula, but the theology implied by Baptist doctrine emphasizes that works do not contribute to justification.
Imputed vs Infused Righteousness	Righteousness is infused by the Holy Spirit into the believer, making the person actually righteous.	Righteousness is understood biblically as a legal standing before God — Christ’s righteousness is credited to the believer by faith. This arises from the broader evangelical theology embedded in the BF&M.
Nature of Justification	A process beginning at baptism and continuing through life, involving sanctification.	A definitive act received through faith, part of salvation that also includes regeneration and sanctification.
Security and Perseverance	Justification can be lost by mortal sin; restoration is possible through repentance (Catholic teaching). (Trent affirms this implicitly in process theology.)	Believers, once justified, shall persevere to the end (with God’s keeping). Falling into sin grieves the Spirit but does not sever justification.

Key Theological Differences

Topic	Catholic	Southern Baptist (BF&M 2000)
Ground of justification	Grace infused, God makes us righteous.	Grace through faith, God credits righteousness.
Faith and Works	Faith united with love and works in growth of righteousness.	Faith alone is the means of receiving justification; works follow.
Nature of the act	Beginning and ongoing transformation.	Definitive act with sanctification as a distinct stage.
Relationship to Sanctification	Closely linked — part of the same reality.	Distinct consequence following justification.
Assurance of Salvation	Hope grounded in God's promise with pastoral caution.	Assurance grounded in the sufficiency of Christ and persevering faith.

Summary in Plain Terms

- Trent's teaching (and current Catholic teaching): Justification is grace that truly changes us inwardly. Faith initiates it, works in love participate, and righteous living by God's grace increases it. The righteousness before God is not just credited but actual and infused.
- Southern Baptist doctrine (BF&M 2000): Justification is God's gracious acquittal of sinners who repent and trust Christ — a one-time act of God's righteousness, bringing peace and favor with God and leading to sanctification.

One of the clearest theological dividing lines between the BF&M 2000 and Catholic teaching is what justification actually *is*

- Catholic: God makes the sinner righteous internally.
- Southern Baptist: God declares the sinner righteous based on Christ.

Everything else — works, sacraments, perseverance — flows from that fundamental difference.

Justification — “Saved from the Penalty of Sin”

- A past event accomplished in Christ.
- Instantaneous declaration by God.
- Received by faith alone in Christ alone.
- Produces peace with God.

Romans 5:1 — “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God...”

Catholic Difference:

Sees justification as forgiveness + inner transformation beginning through sacramental grace rather than a purely forensic declaration.

Sanctification — “Saved from the Power of Sin”

- A present, ongoing process.
- Evidence that salvation is real.
- Driven by the Holy Spirit and obedience.

1 Thessalonians 4:3 — “This is the will of God, your sanctification...”

Catholic Difference:

Sanctification is not sharply separated from justification; it is part of the same grace that makes believers righteous.

Glorification — “Saved from the Presence of Sin”

- A future event.
- Complete perfection in Christ.
- Resurrection body and eternal holiness.

1 John 3:2 — “We shall be like Him...”

Catholic Difference:

Shares belief in final perfection but includes concepts such as final purification prior to full heavenly glory.

Southern Baptist View

Justification = Position changes instantly
Sanctification = Life changes progressively
Glorification = Nature changes perfectly

Catholic View

Justification begins transformation
Sanctification continues that transformation
Glorification completes that transformation

The biggest difference is not glorification — it’s how justification is defined:

- Southern Baptist theology: Declared righteous (forensic)
- Catholic theology: Made righteous (transformational)

That difference shapes how each tradition views works, sacraments, perseverance, and assurance.