

## **Jesus Christ Alone for Salvation and the Defense for Justification**

Question #14: Explain what it means to trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

### **Explanation of the Meaning of Jesus Christ Alone for Salvation – Why This Question in Counseling?**

- Only a proper understanding of Christ can correctly shape the most distinctive convictions of Christian theology.
- We cannot understand who we are in all of our humanity and fallenness apart from comprehending the person and work of Christ.
- Opportunities to disciple and counsel will involve clarity on the gospel. Some may not have a clear understanding of what it means to trust in Christ alone by faith alone for salvation.
- The Reformation centered around this issue, and confusion still exists today on this gospel truth.

### **The Heart of the Gospel.**

- At the heart of the gospel stands the cross of Christ and the doctrine of the atonement. Fully understanding the biblical language regarding the death of Christ requires correct conclusions regarding the person of Christ and especially understanding the cross as penal substitutionary atonement.

### **Penal Substitutionary Atonement**

- Penal because there is a penalty for sin.
  - The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).
  - The Bible depicts humanity as willingly enslaved to sin, having chosen a path of wickedness, which results in God's just sentence of condemnation. John 3:36, Psalm 7:11.
  - This perspective underscores human moral culpability, highlighting that people actively submit to the wickedness that enslaves them and thus stand guilty before God. Roman 5, esp v.6,12-23.
- Substitutionary because Christ bore this penalty for us.
  - 2 Corinthians 5:21 - He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
  - Gal 3:13 - Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.”
  - Isaiah 53:5 - But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. (cf. 1 Peter 2:24).
- Atonement - because we are reconciled to God by the cross.
  - The means or agency whereby the reconciliation of two who have been at variance is brought about. The word is used with great frequency in the Old Testament Scriptures, especially in the very common phrase “to make atonement,” in the sense of to give or to do that which removes estrangement and re-establishes peace (Ex. 30:10; Lev 9:7, 16:10-32, Num 8:19-21).
  - Romans 5:10 - For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life (See also 2 Cor. 5:18-20; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20-21; Heb 2:17).

### **Atonement provides Propitiation and Expiation**

- With this covering of sin two ideas are necessarily connected: the one having respect to God's justice, and represented by the word propitiation; the other having respect to the sinner's guilt, and represented by the word expiation. Our Lord's self-sacrifice embodies not only that on account of which (pro-pitiation) the wrath of a holy God against sin is appeased and the enmity of the sinner's soul is removed, but also that by which the guilt of sin is cleansed from the soul (ex-piation) and the obligation of punishment is canceled.

### **Jesus Christ – the Unique God-Man**

- Christ alone is the one who fulfills God's righteousness as a man, reconciles God with humanity, establishes God's kingdom in this world, and achieves the forgiveness of sin because, and only because, he is utterly unique as God the Son incarnate.
- John 3:16 – “only begotten” is “uniquely born.”
- Hypostatic Union - Humans need a savior who is simultaneously divine, human, and sinless, and Christ's ability to be a sacrifice for sin depends on this union. As a man, He could identify with the human race and offer a sacrifice for sin, but as God, He could give that sacrifice an infinite value sufficient to be a propitiation for the sins of the world. The hypostatic union enables Christ to be a faithful High Priest who can intercede and advocate for believers. To do this effectively, He must be fully God to understand God's requirements and fully man to comprehend human needs.

### **Scripture is *Christotelic***

- The entire plan of God moves to its conclusion in Christ. He alone is the telos, the terminus and fulfillment of God's promises and covenants. He is life and life eternal.
- John 17:3 - “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.
- Luke 24:25-27 - And He said to them, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! “Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

### **Components of Saving Faith**

- Intellectual Aspect (Knowledge). Rom 10:17 Must understand the content (1 Cor 15:1-3). Application: The counselee may have a poor understanding of what saving faith is. James 2:19 – even demons believe.  
1 John 2:19 – they went out from us, but they were not of us.
- Emotional aspect (Conviction). John 16:8 convicts the world concerning sin... Acts 2:37 “cut to the heart”
- Volitional Aspect (Trust). The “I will trust in Christ” statement. Rom. 10:9.

### **The Importance of this to Biblical Counseling**

- Jesus Christ is uniquely essential for biblical counseling because He alone makes theological truths applicable to people, occupying the center of Christian theology and all of life (2 Cor 1:20) “For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.”
- He is the only source of genuine, lasting help that addresses problems at a depth and

- power unavailable through secular interventions.
- Biblical counseling is fundamentally Christ-centered, constantly pointing people to Jesus' power to change and comfort, whether calling unbelievers to salvation or believers to sanctification.
- Christ's unique ability to save stems from his dual nature - fully God and fully human - which enables him to bear the infinite penalty of sin and represent humanity in righteousness.
- While common grace allows some understanding, only Christ's special saving grace can truly overcome sin's corrosive effects, making secular counseling methods ultimately insufficient.
- Ultimately, faithful counseling must have Jesus Christ as its ultimate goal, with every conversation directed toward pointing people to and building them up in Christ.

## References

- MacArthur, John, and Richard Mayhue, eds. *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017.
- Lambert, Heath. *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2016.
- Murray, John. *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955.

## For Further Reading:

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## The Biblical Defense of Justification

Question #15: Provide an explanation and biblical defense of justification.

### What is Justification?

- Justification is a profound theological concept where God freely pardons sinners' sins and accepts them as righteous, not based on their own actions, but solely on Christ's perfect obedience and satisfaction, which is imputed to them and received by faith alone.
- "This is the truth of the Gospel. It is also the principal article of all Christian doctrine, wherein the knowledge of all godliness consisteth. Most necessary it is, therefore, that we should know this article well, teach it unto others, and beat it into their heads continually." — Martin Luther
- Justification is that aspect of the application of redemption in which God **legally declares** the sinner to be righteous in his sight. The ground of this declaration is the righteousness of Christ that he accomplished in the sinner's stead by (1) dying to provide forgiveness of sin and (2) walking in perfect obedience to his Father in order to provide the righteousness required for fellowship with God. By grace alone, God imputes our sin to Christ so that he might truly bear our punishment, and he imputes Christ's righteousness to us so that we might stand before him in perfect holiness. This imputation is mediated through faith alone; it is received apart from any works on the sinner's part. The good works that necessarily follow justification are the evidence—not the ground—of true and

saving faith.

### Why Do We Need Justification?

- Apart from justification, human beings cannot be right with God, for God requires perfect obedience. Partial obedience will not do, and if we think our works are sufficient, we have an inadequate view of both sin and God's justice.
- "Human beings vainly imagine they can be right before God because they do not think about God's justice." – John Calvin
- A right relationship to God can't be gained by works since all people sin; thus the only pathway to salvation is faith.

### So, Does Faith Justify us?

- Faith shouldn't be construed as a work, as if faith itself justifies us, for if such were the case, then faith would be a good work that makes us right with God.
- Faith justifies as an instrument. Faith is not something that originates with human beings. Yes, human beings believe the gospel and are saved, and so in that sense faith is exercised by human beings. At the same time, however, faith ultimately comes from the Holy Spirit and is a gift of God. Ephesians 2:8-9.
- Faith alone accords with the God-centered character of the gospel, for faith gives all glory to God for our salvation.

### Romans on Justification

- For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." Romans 1:16–17.
- Following the salutation of the Letter, Paul begins his theological treatise with justification and the righteousness of God.
- The word "justify" is δικαιόω (dikaiōō) and the word "righteousness" is δικαιοσύνη (dikaiosynē). They come from the same root word. So, to justify is "to be put right with" and righteousness is the "state of being put in right standing."

### Man's Unrighteousness

- Romans 1:18–25 <sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup> because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup> For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. <sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. <sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them over in the lusts

of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.<sup>25</sup> For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

### Romans on Justification

- Romans 1:18-3:20 deals with man's state apart from Christ—he is unrighteous.
- For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, v. 1:18.
- "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; v. 3:10, 11.
- Therefore...  
"Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." (v. 19, 20).
- Romans 3:21–26 – But now apart from the Law the **righteousness of God** has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the **righteousness of God** through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **being justified as a gift** by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to **demonstrate His righteousness**, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His **righteousness** at the present time, so that He would **be just** and **the justifier** of the one who has faith in Jesus.
- Also, Gal 2:16 – by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified

### Justification by Faith evidenced in the Old Testament

- Romans 4:3–5 – For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.
- Romans 4:25 – He [Jesus] who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

### Romans: The Results of Justification

- Romans 5:1–2 – Therefore, **having been justified by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained **our introduction by faith** into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.
- Paul continues to build on the impact of justification. He uses the "much more then" language to emphasize the impact justification has in the life of the believing saint. (5:9, 10, 15)
- Romans 5:18–19 – So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the **many will be made righteous**.

### **Romans: Justification → Sanctification → Glorification**

- Justification – free from the penalty of sin (Rom 3-5)
- Sanctification – free from the power of sin (Rom 6-7).
- Glorification free from the presence of sin (Rom 8).
- Romans 8:28–30 – And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also **justified**; and these whom He **justified**, **He also glorified**.

### **Romans: Our Justification → a call to respond by faith**

- Paul deals with the Jewish nation of Israel in their failure to respond.
- Romans 10:3–4 “For not knowing about God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.
- The content of belief:  
Romans 10:9–10 – that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved*; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

### **God – Man – Christ – Response**

#### **Justification Involves a Double Imputation**

- With respect to justification, then, God not only satisfies the penal demands of the law by imputing our sin to Christ and punishing him in our place but also satisfies the positive demands of the law by imputing Christ’s righteousness to us. Paul describes this great exchange in:
- 2 Cor. 5:21 – He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
- In justification, the perfect righteousness that God requires (Matt. 5:20, 48) is not worked in us in a transformative sense but is credited to us through our union with Christ, the Righteous One, who has fulfilled all righteousness on our behalf (Matt. 3:15; Gal. 3:27).

#### **Implications for Justification in Biblical Counseling**

- Our counselees have two choices: 1) Trust in God or 2) trust in themselves. God comes to us with His righteousness. To add to it is to subtract from it.
- There is now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1).
- What shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? Nothing can separate you from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:31–39).
- Through justification, we exult in hope of the glory of God (Rom 5:2), which provides us with the power to exult in our tribulation (Rom 5:3) and provides us with hope – a hope that does not disappoint (Rom 5:5).

- Understanding justification by faith precedes the discussion Paul has regarding sanctification. So, counselors should confidently speak of our justification by faith in Christ as an anchor of the soul (Heb 6:19).
- Romans 12 opens with a passage exhorting us in our lives and ministries and is full of admonitions helpful in counseling, but justification by faith in Christ alone must come first.
- Romans 12:1–2 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.
- Paul concludes with great encouragement to the counselor: “And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another (Romans 15:14).
- “The gospel encourages me to rest in my righteous standing with God, a standing which Christ Himself has accomplished and always maintains for me. I never have to do a moment’s labor to gain or maintain my justified status before God! Freed from the burden of such a task, I now can put my energies into enjoying God, pursuing holiness, and ministering God’s amazing grace to others.

The gospel also reminds me that my righteous standing with God always holds firm regardless of my performance, because my standing is based solely on the work of Jesus and not mine. On my worst days of sin and failure, the gospel encourages me with God’s unrelenting grace toward me. On my best days of victory and usefulness, the gospel keeps me relating to God solely on the basis of Jesus’ righteousness and not mine.” – Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer for Christians*.

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