

The Church of the Servant King
Soteriology Series

SO_5_What Christ Accomplished in His Death-Part 4 – Forgiveness & Justification

Definition & Description

Forgiveness and justification are two separate, but related concepts in Scripture. They are similar in the sense that they both describe aspects of the one operation of God in clearing the sinner of his sins. They are separate in the sense that they describe negative (forgiveness) and positive (justification) activities related to that operation. **Forgiveness** is the remission or the taking away of the legal penalty for sins. **Justification** is the judicial declaration of a righteous standing before God.¹

Forgiveness

The two New Testament words for forgiveness are *aphiemi* (ἀφίημι) and *charizomai* (χαρίζομαι). *Aphiemi* means to send away, dismiss or release. *Charizomai* means to bestow favor unconditionally or to bestow grace. *Aphiemi* indicates what happens to sins – they are remitted, sent away, dismissed. *Charizomai* reveals the divine grace through the death of Christ which made it possible for God to clear the sinner from the guilt and penalty of sins and restore the sinner to a position of perfect standing before God.²

Paul, the apostle of grace, uses *charizomai* almost exclusively when he speaks of forgiveness (2 Co 2:7, 10; 12:13; Eph 4:32; Col 2:13; 3:13); whereas he uses *aphiemi* only once (Rom 4:7). Christ also used *charizomai* in the parable of the two debtors in Luke 7:42 – “and when they had nothing to pay, he freely forgave them both.”

The Mosaic Law required that a judge execute judgment toward the wicked and justify the righteous – “If there be a controversy between men, and they come into judgment, that the judges may judge them; then shall they justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked” (Deut 25:1). In other words, under the Law, the judge had no authority to justify the wicked or the sinner or to condemn the righteous. Yet, this is exactly what happened when God the Father made provision for our forgiveness through the death of His righteous Son, Jesus Christ.

Justification

Justification is the imputation or crediting the righteousness of God to the believer’s account. Unlike a human judge, God has the authority to forgive the sinner and condemn the righteous. What a demonstration of His love! Even though justification is not strictly a Pauline doctrine, Paul alone expounds the doctrine and teaches the basis upon which God can justify the ungodly sinner. The epistles of Romans and Galatians contain the primary teaching on this subject. The word most frequently used is *dikaioo* (δικαίω) which means to justify or declare righteous. A list of some of the passages follows:

For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. (Rom 2:13) [In context, Paul is building up to the argument that all – Jew and Gentile – have fallen short of the righteous demands of the law. See 3:22-23.]

¹ Charles F. Baker, *A Dispensational Theology* (Grace Publications: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1994), 441.

² *Ibid.*, 442.

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be *justified* in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20)

Being *justified* freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. (Rom 3:24)

Therefore we conclude that a man is *justified* by faith without the deeds of the law. (Rom 3:28)

To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just and the *justifier* of him which believeth in Jesus. (Rom 3:26)

Seeing it is one God, which shall *justify* the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith. (Rom 3:30)

For if Abraham were *justified* by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. (Rom 4:2)

But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that *justifieth* the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. (Rom 4:5)

Therefore being *justified* by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom 5:1)

Much more then, being now *justified* by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. (Rom 5:9)

Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also *justified*; and whom he *justified*, them he also glorified. (Rom 8:30)

And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are *justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Co 6:11)

Knowing that a man is not *justified* by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be *justified* by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be *justified*. But if, while we seek to be *justified* by Christ, we ourselves also be found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. (Gal 2:16, 17)

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would *justify* the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. (Gal 3:8)

But that no man is *justified* by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for the just shall live by faith. (Gal 3:11)

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be *justified* by faith. (Gal 3:24)

Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are *justified* by the law; ye are fallen from grace. (Gal 5:4)

That being *justified* by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:7)

Sometimes Paul states the case negatively, i.e. he stresses the impossibility of being justified by the works of the law. On other occasions, he states the case positively, i.e. that we are justified by grace through faith. God in the form of the second Person of the Trinity is the judge Who accepted the penalty of condemnation for sin even though He was perfectly righteous. Man, the condemned, accepts this gift by faith and is justified, i.e. the recipient of divine righteousness, not a human righteousness.

Justification and the Concept of Imputation

Justification is based upon two *judicial* imputations. A *judicial* imputation is one in which the object of the imputation is unworthy of that which is being imputed to it.³ We have nothing inherent in us that warrants the imputation of God's righteousness to us. Christ had nothing in Him that deserved the imputation of the sins of the human race to Him while He hung on a Cross. God the Father judicially imputed the sins of the world to Christ on the Cross so that He (God the Father) might be able to judicially impute His righteousness to those who place their trust in Christ's provision and not their own righteous works – "not by the works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:5).

Conclusion

Some have tried to define *justification* with the catch phrase – *just as if I had never sinned*. However, this is not a good definition. If we had never sinned, then we would have human righteousness – a relative, self-righteousness. Instead, we are made the righteousness of God in Christ through the judicial imputation of Christ's righteousness to us at the moment of having placed our trust in Christ (2 Cor 5:21).

³ The other type of imputation is a *real* or *non-judicial* imputation. A real imputation is one in which the recipient of that which is being imputed deserves the imputation. For instance, since we have an old sin nature, the imputation of Adam's original sin to the old sin nature is a *real* imputation. For a greater discussion of the subject of real and judicial imputations, see Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas, Texas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), Volume II, 296-315. Millard J. Erickson in his book *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1983), 818 makes an interesting observation regarding the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer. He states "the transfer of the righteousness of Christ ... is not an arm's-length transaction. Rather, it is a matter of the two, Christ and the believer, becoming one in the sight of God...It is as if, with respect to one's spiritual status, a new entity has come into being. It is as if Christ and I have been married, or have merged to form a new corporation. Thus, the imputation of his righteousness is not so much a matter of transferring something from one person to another, as it is a matter of bringing the two together, so that they hold all things in common. In Christ I died on the cross, and in him I was resurrected. Thus, his death is not only in my place, but with me." Erickson is therefore emphasizing the concept of union with Christ in his analysis of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer.