

JUSTIFICATION

1. Definitions.

a. Concept.

- (1) Phase one: God's official declaration that a person is righteous and acceptable to him.
- (2) Phase two: God's official declaration that a person is qualified for some recognition or responsibility.
- (3) Phase three: God's official declaration that a person is qualified for some reward.

b. Biblical terms.

- (1) צַדִּיק: "of a thing which is examined and found to be in order: just...juridical; persons whose conduct will be checked and found irreproachable, innocent, in the right...morally in the right, innocent...in a religious sense, just, upright, devout... the upright person, behaving correctly and coping with his life...the pious person, one belonging to the community of Yahweh...the pious person who has his pleasure in the commandments...who is regarded as just, correct" (*HALOT*, 1002-03).
- (2) צָדַק: "be in the right, be right...to be just...justified...to make someone appear upright, innocent...to prove oneself upright...to declare as in the right...to prove oneself innocent" (*HALOT*, 1003-04).
- (3) δικαιοῦν: "to render a favorable verdict, vindicate...as activity of humans justify, vindicate, treat as just...of experience or activity of transcendent figures, esp. in relation to humans...of God be found in the right, be free of charges...Paul, who has influenced later wr...uses the word almost exclusively of God's judgment. As affirmative verdict...be acquitted, be pronounced and treated as righteous and thereby become δίκαιος, receive the divine gift of δικαιοσύνη through faith in Christ Jesus and apart from νόμος as a basis for evaluation...to cause someone to be released from personal or institutional claims that are no longer to be considered pertinent or valid, make free/pure...to demonstrate to be morally right, prove to be right" (*BDAG*, 249).
- (4) λογίζομαι: "[T]o determine by mathematical process, reckon, calculate, freq. in a transf. sense...count, take into account τὶ someth" (*BDAG*, 597).

c. English terms.

- (1) Justify: "from Late Latin *justificare*, from Latin *justus*...14th century...to prove or show to be just, right, or reasonable...to show to have had a sufficient legal reason" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 2003).
- (2) Vindicate: "Latin *vindicatus*...circa 1571...*obsolete*: to set free: deliver...to free from allegation or blame...confirm, substantiate...to provide justification or defense for: justify" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 2003).

d. The "justification" word group (δικαιῶν, δικαιοσύνη, δίκαιος) is flexible. It is used differently by different biblical authors on different occasions.

- (a) **Mt 11:19** 19 ...Wisdom is vindicated (δικαιῶν, aor. pass.) by her deeds.
- (b) **Lk 10:29** 29 But [the lawyer], desiring to vindicate himself, said to Jesus, And who is my neighbour?
- (c) **1 Ti 3:16** 16 Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated (δικαιῶν, aor. pass.) by the Spirit, seen by

angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

- e. A person may be justified or vindicated in any number of contexts.
 - (1) A criminal defendant is vindicated when he or she is declared not guilty by a judge (an analogy to phase one justification).
 - (2) A competitive athlete is vindicated when he or she receives a medal at an awards ceremony (an analogy to phase two justification).
- f. Unfortunately, many interpreters commit the fallacy of illegitimate totality transfer when interpreting the justification word group. They falsely assume justification always or nearly always has a certain technical meaning.¹ To them, justification always refers to phase one justification. Don't make this mistake!
 - (1) When interpreting the Bible, let the immediate context rule.
- g. Always ask, "Justified from what, for what?"

2. Self-Justification.

- a. What we really need is justification before God, not justification before men.
 - (1) **Lk 16:15** 15 [Jesus] said to [the Pharisees], You are those who justify (δικαιώω) yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.
- b. We are to have the attitude of the tax collector, not the attitude of the Pharisee.
 - (1) **Lk 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. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.
- c. Self-justification before God is impossible because there's always more we should do.
 - (1) **Lk 18:18-23** 18 And a ruler asked [Jesus], Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? 19 And Jesus said to him, Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. 20 You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery. Do not murder. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother. 21 And he said, All these I have kept from my youth. 22 When Jesus heard this, he said to him, One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me. 23 But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.
- d. By the works of the Torah no one will be justified in God's sight.
 - (1) **Ro 3:20** 20 ...By works of the Torah no flesh will be justified (δικαιώω, fut. pass.) in his sight, because through the Torah comes knowledge of sin.
 - (a) The works of the Torah represent all man-made rules of every religion.

¹ See D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 1996), 45, 60-61.

- (b) No religious works of any kind are able to justify us in God's sight.
- (2) **Ga 2:16-17** 16 ... We know that a person is not justified (δικαιόω, pres. pass.) by works of the Torah but through faith in Jesus Messiah, so we also have believed in Messiah Jesus, in order to be justified (δικαιόω, aor. pass.) by faith in Messiah and not by works of the Torah, because by works of the Torah no one will be justified (δικαιόω, fut. pass.).
- (3) **Ga 3:10-12** 10 For all who rely on works of the Torah are under a curse. For it is written, Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Torah and do them. 11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the Torah, for the righteous shall live by faith. 12 But the Torah is not of faith. Rather, the one who does them shall live by them.
- e. We may be able to boast before men. But we are unable to boast before God.
- (1) **Ro 4:1-2** 1 What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified (δικαιόω, aor. pass.) by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.
- f. If justification were through the Torah, Jesus died for no purpose.
- (1) **Ga 2:21** 21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the Torah, then Messiah died for no purpose.
- (2) "...The glory of Christ's merit suffers injury when, by such observances, we undertake to merit justification."²
- g. Self-justification severs us from Jesus.
- (1) **Ga 5:4** 4 You are severed from Messiah, you who would be justified by the Torah. You have fallen away from grace.

3. God, the Justifier.

- a. Our justification is from God.
- (1) **Is 54:17** 17 You will refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the inheritance (הִרְשָׁה) of the servants of Yahweh and their justification (הִרְצָה) from me, declares Yahweh.
- b. God is the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.
- (1) **Ro 3:26** 26 It was to show [God's] righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.
- c. It is God who justifies.
- (1) **Ro 8:33-34** 33 Who shall bring any charge (ἐγκαλέω)³ against God's elect? It is God who justifies (δικαιόω, pres. act.). 34 Who is to condemn? Messiah Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

4. Through Jesus Alone.

- a. Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would make many to be accounted righteous.
- (1) **Is 53:11** 11 Out of the anguish of [the Servant's] soul he will see and be satisfied. By his knowledge will the Righteous one (קִיָּיִם), my Servant, make many to be accounted righteous (קִיָּיִם, hif.), and he will bear their iniquities.

² Philipp Melancthon, *The Augsburg Confession*.

³ "Legal t.t. bring charges against, *accuse*" (BDAG, 273).

- b. We have now been justified by Jesus' substitutionary death.
 - (1) **Ro 5:8-9** 8 ...But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Messiah died for us. 9 Because, therefore, we have now been justified (δικαιώω, aor. pass.) by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.
- c. Jesus' one act of righteousness leads to the possibility of justification for all people.
 - (1) **Ro 5:18-19** 18 ...As one trespass led to condemnation for all people, so one act of righteousness leads to justification (δικαίωσις) and life for all people. 19 For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made (καθίστημι)⁴ righteous.
- d. Having died with Jesus, we have been justified from sin.
 - (1) **Ro 6:7-8** 7 For one who has died has been justified (δικαιώω, perf. pass.) from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Messiah, we believe that we will also live with him.
- e. We are justified in the name of Jesus and by the Holy Spirit.
 - (1) **1 Co 6:11** 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified (δικαιώω) in the name of the Lord Jesus Messiah and by the Spirit of our God.

5. By Grace Through Faith.

- a. Problem.
 - (1) "The New Testament clearly teaches that bare faith cannot save, and that works are necessary for final justification or final salvation."⁵
- b. God clothed Adam and Eve with garments of skins, a symbol of justification by grace.
 - (1) **Ge 3:7** 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.
 - (2) **Ge 3:21** 21 And Yahweh God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.
- c. God regarded Abel's offering, but not Cain's. This indicates God regards faith but not works.
 - (1) **Ge 4:3-5** 3 In the course of time Cain brought to Yahweh an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4 and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And Yahweh had regard for Abel and his offering, 5 but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.
- d. Abraham believed, and God counted it to him as righteousness.
 - (1) **Ge 15:5-6** 5 [Yahweh] brought [Abram] outside and said, Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them. Then he said to him, So shall your seed be. 6 And he believed (ἠπίσταν, LXX πιστεύω, aor.) Yahweh, and he counted (ἠλογίσθη, LXX λογίζομαι, aor. pass.) it to him as righteousness (ἠδικαιοσύνη, LXX δικαιοσύνη).
- e. According to Habakkuk, the righteous will live by faith.

⁴ "[C]ause someone to experience someth., *make, cause*" (BDAG, 492).

⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Faith Alone—The Doctrine of Justification: What the Reformers Taught and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 191.

- (1) **Hab 2:4** 4 Behold, his soul is puffed up. It is not upright within him, but the righteous (קִיָּץ) will live by his faith.
- (2) In this verse, קִיָּץ could be translated “the justified.”
- (3) Justification by grace through faith is certainly an Old Testament concept.
- f. By Jesus, everyone who believes is justified.
 - (1) **Ac 13:36-39** 38 Let it be known to you therefore, brothers and sisters, that through this man [Jesus] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, 39 and by him everyone who believes is justified (δικαιόω, pres.) from everything from which you could not be justified (δικαιόω, aor.) by the Torah of Moses.
- g. We are justified by God’s grace as a gift.
 - (1) **Ro 3:21-25** 21 Now the righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) of God has been manifested apart from the Torah, although the Torah and the Prophets testify to it— 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Messiah for all who believe. For there is no distinction. 23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Messiah Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.
- h. The principle of justification through faith excludes all boasting.
 - (1) **Ro 3:27-28** 27 Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. 28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the Torah.
 - (2) Justification by grace through faith is non-meritorious.
- i. God justifies Jews by faith and Gentiles through faith.
 - (1) **Ro 3:29-30** 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 because God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.
 - (2) Faith is the only way for both Jews and Gentiles to be justified before God.
- j. We are justified through faith in Jesus.
 - (1) **Ga 2:16-17** 16 ... We know that a person is not justified (δικαιόω, pres. pass.) by works of the Torah but through faith in Jesus Messiah, so we also have believed in Messiah Jesus, in order to be justified (δικαιόω, aor. pass.) by faith in Messiah and not by works of the Torah, because by works of the Torah no one will be justified (δικαιόω, fut. pass.).
 - (2) **Ga 3:24** 24 ... The Torah was our guardian until Messiah came, in order that we might be justified (δικαιόω, aor. pass.) by faith.
- k. We are justified by grace.
 - (1) **Ti 3:5-7** 5 [God] saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Messiah our Savior, 7 so that being justified (δικαιόω, aor. pass.) by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.
- l. At the moment of faith, we are justified from all sins—past, present, and future.
 - (1) All of our personal sins were future when Jesus died on the cross.
 - (2) Jesus proactively paid for our personal sins on the cross.
- m. Protestant Reformation.
 - (1) “Of Justification. Also they teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through

faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight. Rom. 3 and 4.”⁶

- (2) “Of New Obedience. Also they teach that this faith is bound to bring forth good fruits, and that it is necessary to do good works commanded by God, because of God's will, but that we should not rely on those works to merit justification before God. For remission of sins and justification is apprehended by faith, as also the voice of Christ attests: When ye shall have done all these things, say: We are unprofitable servants. Luke 17, 10. The same is also taught by the Fathers. For Ambrose says: It is ordained of God that he who believes in Christ is saved, freely receiving remission of sins, without works, by faith alone.”⁷

6. Credit of Righteousness.

a. English terms.

- (1) Ascribe: “[S]ynonym ascribe, attribute, assign, impute, credit mean to lay something to the account of a person or thing. ascribe suggests an inferring or conjecturing of cause, quality, authorship (forged paintings formerly *ascribed* to masters). attribute suggests less tentativeness than ascribe, less definiteness than assign (*attributed* to Rembrandt but possibly done by an associate). assign implies ascribing with certainty or after deliberation (*assigned* the bones to the Cretaceous Period). impute suggests ascribing something that brings discredit by way of accusation or blame (tried to *impute* sinister motives to my actions). credit implies ascribing a thing or especially an action to a person or other thing as its agent, source, or explanation (*credited* his teammates for his success)” (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 2003).

b. Our faith is determined by mathematical process as righteousness.

- (1) **Ro 4:3-5** 3 For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited (λογίζομαι) to him as righteousness. 4 Now to the one who works, his wages are not credited as a gift but as his due. 5 And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies (δικαίω) the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness....
- (2) λογίζομαι: “[T]o determine by mathematical process, *reckon, calculate*, freq. in a transf. sense...count, take into account τὶ someth” (BDAG, 597).
- (3) The crediting of righteousness to us is a legal transaction that God manages.
- (4) We are not just “not guilty.” We are credited with righteousness. We don't just go from -R to zero, but from -R to +R.
- (5) Justification is not “just-as-if-I-never sinned.”

c. We don't return to the nakedness of Adam and Eve. We are arrayed in white linen!

- (1) **Re 19:14** 14 And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following [Jesus] on white horses.
- (2) With +R, we're better off than Adam and Eve before the fall.

⁶ Philipp Melanchthon, *The Augsburg Confession*, Article IV.

⁷ Philipp Melanchthon, *The Augsburg Confession*, Article VI.

7. Abraham, the Prime Example.

- a. Abram believed God about his seed, and God credited to him as righteousness.
 - (1) **Ge 15:5-6** 5 [Yahweh] brought [Abram] outside and said, Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them. Then he said to him, So shall your seed be. 6 And he believed (אָמַן, LXX πιστεύω, aor.) Yahweh, and he credited (חָשַׁב, LXX λογίζομαι, aor. pass.) it to him as righteousness (הֶקְדָּשׁ, LXX δικαιοσύνη).
 - (2) This is the first usage of both חָשַׁב and הֶקְדָּשׁ in the Bible.
 - (3) Abram was uncircumcised when this legal transaction took place.
 - (4) This verse is so significant, as Paul understood.
- b. The words “it was credited to him” were written in *Genesis* for our sake.
 - (1) **Ro 4:20-25** 20 No unbelief made [Abraham] waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21 fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. 22 That is why his faith was credited (λογίζομαι, aor. pass.) to him as righteousness. 23 But the words it was credited to him were not written for his sake alone, 24 but for ours also. It will be credited to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, 25 who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification (δικαίωσις).⁸
- c. Through Abraham, Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith.
 - (1) **Ga 3:5-9** 5 Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the Torah, or by hearing with faith— 6 just as Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness? 7 Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the good news beforehand to Abraham saying, In you shall all the nations be blessed. 9 So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

8. No Condemnation.

- a. When God declares us justified, no one can declare us guilty.
 - (1) **Is 50:7-9** 7 Lord Yahweh helps me. Therefore I have not been disgraced. Therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame. 8 He who vindicates (קָדַשׁ) me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me. 9 Behold, Lord Yahweh helps me. Who will declare me guilty?
 - (2) Justification worked the same in the OT as it does in the NT.
- b. We are able to refute everyone who rises against us judgment, including Satan.
 - (1) **Is 54:17** 17 You will refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the inheritance (הֲרֵתָה) of the servants of Yahweh and their justification (הֶקְדָּשׁ) from me, declares Yahweh.
 - (2) **Re 12:10** 10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah have come, for the accuser [Satan] of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

⁸ “[J]ustification, vindication, acquittal” (*BDAG*, 250).

- c. There is no condemnation for those who are in Jesus.
- (1) **Ro 8:1** 1 There is therefore now no condemnation/punishment/penalty (κατάκριμα) for those who are in Messiah Jesus.
 - (2) κατάκριμα: “[J]udicial pronouncement upon a guilty person, *condemnation, punishment, penalty*” (BDAG, 518).
- d. No one is able to condemn us.
- (1) **Ro 8:33-34** 33 Who shall bring any charge (ἐγκαλέω)⁹ against God’s elect? It is God who justifies (δικαιόω, pres. act.). 34 Who is to condemn? Messiah Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

9. Two Difficult Passages.

- a. **Mt 12:36-37** 36 I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, 37 for by your words you will be justified (δικαιόω), and by your words you will be condemned (καταδικάζω).
- (1) Jesus’ point is the same as Paul’s in Ro 10:8-10. What we say indicates what we believe. When we speak the Great Confession, it shows we believe it.
 - (2) **Mt 16:16** 16 Simon Peter replied, You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.
 - (3) **Ro 10:8-10** 8 But what does it say? The message is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the message of faith that we proclaim). 9 Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.
- b. **Jas 2:20-26** 20 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless (ἀργός)? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified (δικαιόω, aor. pass.) 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 credited 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.
- (1) James is writing to believers, not unbelievers.
 - (2) James wrote his epistle before Paul wrote any of us. He is using the term justification differently from Paul, which he is allowed to do!
 - (3) In Ge 15, Abram is declared positionally righteous. In Ge 22, Abraham is declared operationally righteous.
 - (4) In Ge 15, Abraham is justified for eternal life. In Ge 22, he is justified for recognition and reward.
 - (5) In phase two, faith without works makes a believer dead, that is, useless (ἀργός).
 - (a) ἀργός: “pert. to being without anything to do, unemployed, idle...pert. to being unwilling to work, idle, lazy...pert. to being unproductive, useless, worthless” (BDAG, 128).

⁹ “Legal t.t. bring charges against, *accuse*” (BDAG, 273).

- (b) In Jas 2, “dead” equals useless, not unsaved.
- (6) In every case, context must determine how a term like justification is being used.

10. Benefits.

- a. Peace with God and access into grace.
 - (1) **Ro 5:1-2** 1 Because we were justified (δικαιόω, aor. pass.) by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Messiah. 2 Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.
- b. Rescue from the wrath of God.
 - (1) **Ro 5:8-9** 8 ...But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Messiah died for us. 9 Because, therefore, we have now been justified (δικαιόω, aor. pass.) by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.
- c. Glorification.
 - (1) **Ro 8:29-30** 29 For those whom [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified (δικαιόω, aor. act.), and those whom he justified (δικαιόω, aor. act.) he also glorified.
- d. Eternal life.
 - (1) **Ti 3:5-7** 5 [God] saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Bibliography

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