

WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH – CHAPTER 11

“Justification” – Part 1 of 4*

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1. Those whom God effectually calls he also freely justifies^a, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins and by accounting and accepting them as righteous. It is not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone that they are justified. It is not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other act of Christian obedience to them, as their righteousness, but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ to them^b who receive and rest on him and his righteousness by faith. Men do not have this faith of themselves; it is the gift of God.^c
a. Rom. 8:30; 3:24; 5:15-16 b. Rom. 4:5-8; 2 Cor. 5:19, 21; Rom. 3:22-28; Titus 3:5, 7; Eph. 1:7; Jer. 23:6; 1 Cor. 1:30-31; Rom. 5:17-19
c. John 1:12; Acts 10:43; 13:38-39; Phil. 3:9; Eph. 2:7-8; John 6:44-45, 65; Phil. 1:29
2. Faith—receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness—is the only instrument of justification;^d yet it is not the only grace in the person justified, but is always accompanied by all other saving graces. Justifying faith is not dead, but works by love.^e
d. John 3:18, 36; Rom. 3:28; 5:1 e. James 2:17, 22, 26; Gal. 5:6
3. Christ, by his obedience and death, fully discharged the debt of all those who are justified. He made a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father’s justice in their behalf.^f Yet, because he was freely given by the Father for them^g, and because his obedience and satisfaction were freely accepted in their stead,^h and not for anything in them, their justification is only of free grace.ⁱ It was God’s purpose in the justification of sinners to glorify both his exact justice and his rich grace.^k
f. Mark 10:45; Rom. 5:8-10, 18-19; Gal. 3:13; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; Heb. 1:3; 10:10, 14; Dan. 9:24, 26; Isa. 52:13-53:12 g. Rom. 8:32; John 3:16
h. 2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 5:2; Phil 2:6-9; Isa. 53:10-11 i. Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7 k. Rom. 3:26; Eph. 2:7; Zech. 9:9; Isa. 45:21
4. God, from all eternity, decreed to justify all the elect.^l In the fullness of time, Christ died for their sins and rose again for their justification.^m Nevertheless, they are not justified until, in due time, the Holy Spirit actually applies Christ to them.ⁿ
l. Rom. 8:29-30; Gal. 3:8; 1 Pet. 1:2, 19-20 m. Gal. 4:4; 1 Tim. 2:6; Rom. 4:25 n. Eph. 2:3; Titus 3:3-7; Gal. 2:16; Col. 1:21-22
5. God continues to forgive the sins of those who are justified.^o Although they can never fall from the state of justification^p, yet they may by their sins fall under God’s fatherly displeasure and not have the light of his countenance restored to them until they humble themselves, confess their sin, plead for pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.^q
o. Matt. 6:12; 1 John 1:7, 9; 2:1-2 p. Rom. 5:1-5; 8:30-39; Heb. 10:14; Luke 22:32; John 10:28
q. Ps. 89:30-33; 51; 32:5; Matt. 26:75; Luke 1:20; 1 Cor. 11:30, 32
6. The justification of believers under the Old Testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament.^r
r. Gal. 3:9, 13-14; Rom. 4:6-8, 22-24; 10:6-13; Heb. 13:8

Introduction – “The doctrine of justification is the most controversial issue in the history of Christendom. It was the material cause of the Protestant Reformation, the issue that led to the most serious fragmentation of the Christian church in its history. The debates it raised in the sixteenth century were not over minor details of theology. Both the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant Reformers understood that what was at stake in the controversy was nothing less than the gospel itself. “ Rome condemned the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone and placed its curse upon it.

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“Luther declared in the sixteenth century that the doctrine of justification by faith alone is the article upon which the church stands or falls. Calvin used a different metaphor; he said it is the hinge upon which everything turns.”

Consider a couple of definitions: just - conforming to a standard of correctness, and righteousness - acting in accord with divine or moral law. “Justification has to do with the justice and righteousness of God. God is just. Biblically, justice is always defined in connection with righteousness. To say that one is just is at the same time to say that one is righteous. God is the absolute standard of all righteousness. As our Creator, He is also the supreme, sovereign judge of heaven and earth. The Bible clearly indicates that the one who is the judge of all is Himself perfectly just and righteous.

In one sense, that is very good news for us. To live in a world governed by an unjust being would be a dreadful thing to contemplate. We would have no hope for the ultimate triumph of justice in such a world. So it is good news for us that the ruler and judge of all things is Himself good and righteous.

In another sense, that is very bad news for us, because we are not just. The Scriptures make it clear that this just and righteous God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world, including all of us who are not just and righteous.

“People today hardly get exercised about the doctrine of justification, which was a matter for which our forefathers were willing to die, and many did die.”

“Part of the reason for this modern disinterest may be our concept of the last judgment. The idea of a final judgment to which all people will be subjected has all but disappeared from our thinking, and even from the preaching in most of today’s pulpits—despite Jesus’ repeated warning that we all will stand before God, and that every idle word that we speak will be judged.

Here is the dilemma. If God judges people according to His perfect standard of righteousness, then those who are unjust will be in serious trouble. The psalmist asks, “If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?” (Ps. 130:3). The obvious answer is that no one could stand. We are all guilty of violating the commandments of our Creator, and at some point, we will be called to stand before His judgment seat.

Even people who believe that there will be a judgment often believe that God is so kind and merciful that He will overlook our sins and grant unilateral pardon and forgiveness, so there is nothing to fear. This idea is foreign to the New Testament.”

*Look for the remaining parts in the upcoming newsletters.