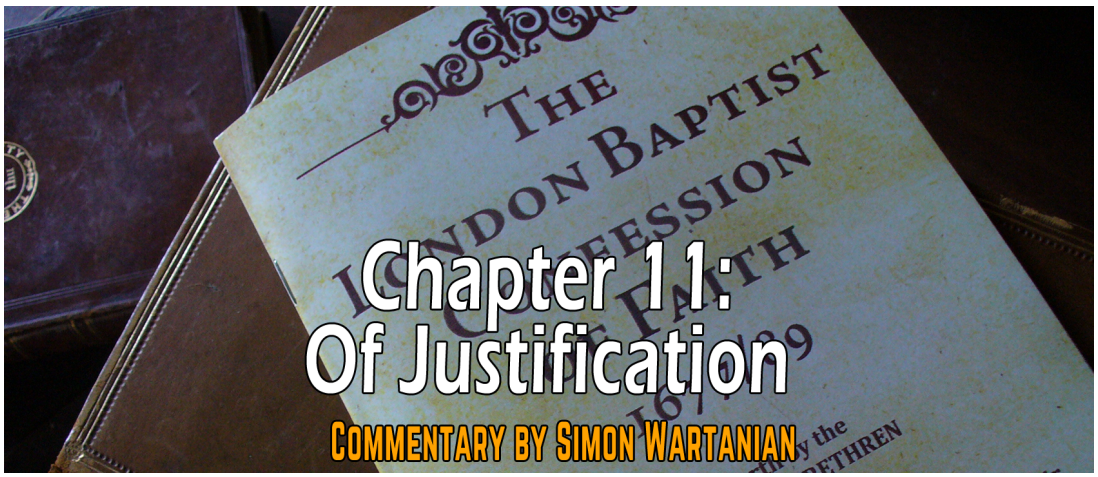
1689 Baptist Confession Chapter 11: Of Justification - Commentary

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Chapter 11: Of Justification

Now we come to the great biblical and Protestant doctrine of justification. Calvin said that "Justification is the main hinge on which salvation turns." There is no salvation without a proper understanding of justification. This is not a secondary issue, it is a foremost essential of true and biblical Christianity. It is one of the things which separates confessional Protestantism from Roman Catholicism. There will be a lot of things which I will point the interested reader to previous chapters, rather than expound again here.

§1 Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth

1. Those whom God effectually calleth, he also **freely justifieth, 1** not by infusing righteousness into them, but by **pardoning their sins,** and by **accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; 2** not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but **for Christ's sake alone; 3** not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but **by imputing Christ's active obedience** unto the whole law, and **passive obedience in his death** for their whole and sole righteousness by faith, which faith they have not of themselves; it is the **gift of God**. **4**
    1. Rom. 8:30; 3:24[1]
    2. Rom. 4:5-8; Eph. 1:7
    3. 1 Cor. 1:30-31; Rom. 5:17-19
    4. 2 Cor. 5:19-21; Titus 3:5, 7; Rom. 3:22-28; Jer. 23:6; Phil. 3:9; Acts 13:38-39; Eph. 2:7-9; Phil. 1:29; 2 Pet 1:1

Those whom God has predestined He **effectually calleth** (**chapter 10**) and **He also freely justifieth** (Rom. 8:30). In this chapter, the Confession is setting forth the biblical doctrine of justification as well as countering the doctrine of justification as taught by the Roman Catholic Church. This justification is **not by infusing righteousness into them**, but by **pardoning their sins** and by **accounting and accepting their persons as righteous…for Christ's sake alone** (Rom. 4:5-8; Eph. 1:7). God does not mix righteousness in us, but puts the righteousness of Christ into our account and counts it as our own. It is on this basis alone that we are righteous before God. **Faith** and **obedience** are not our righteousness, but our righteousness comes from **Christ's active obedience unto the whole law, and passive obedience in His death** (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; **chapter 8:5**). We stand in this righteousness **by faith**, but even this faith is **not of themselves** but **is the gift of God** (Eph. 2:8-9; see also **chapter 14:1**). Therefore, even the condition for our justification and life with God was provided by God. This is the glory and greatness of the New Covenant of Grace in

which we stand and have our relationship with God. All the requirements of the covenant are provided by God through His Spirit based on Christ's work and obedience.

Now that we've dealt with the first three things in Romans 8:29-30, namely God (1) foreknowing us and (2) electing us (**chapter 3**) and (3) effectually calling us (**chapter 10**), we come to the 4th point in the five-pointed chain—justification. What is justification? Dr. Wayne Grudem defines it in this way:

> Justification is an instantaneous legal act of God in which he (1) thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ's righteousness as belonging to us, and (2) declares us to be righteous in his sight.[2]

We could go on and on by giving Protestant theologians who defined justification in this way. Louis Berkhof says:

> *Justification is a judicial act of God, in which He declares,* ***on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ****, that* ***all the claims of the law are satisfied with respect to the sinner****.* It is unique in the application of the work of redemption in that it is a judicial act of God, a declaration respecting the sinner, and not an act or process of renewal, such as regeneration, conversion, and sanctification. While it has respect to the sinner, it does not change his inner life. It does not affect his condition, but his state, and in that respect differs from all the other principal parts of the order of salvation. It involves the forgiveness of sins, and restoration to divine favor.[3]

The Baptist A.H. Strong defined it as:

> By justification we mean that judicial act of God by which, **on account of Christ**, to whom the sinner is united by faith, **he declares that sinner to be no longer exposed to the penalty of the law, but to be restored to his favor.** Or, to give an alternative definition from which all metaphor is excluded: Justification is the reversal of God's attitude toward the sinner, because of the sinner's new relation to Christ. God did condemn; he now acquits. He did repel; he now admits to favor.[4]

Section one first deals with a distortion about justification and then gives the biblical position.

Not Infusion of Righteousness

Roman Catholics believe in what may be called "infused righteousness." This means that in salvation, the merits of the Lord Jesus on the cross are infused with the righteousness of the sinner and together they constitute the basis of salvation. Meaning, Christ's righteousness is not enough, rather it is given to help us with our own righteousness through works and obedience to God and the Roman Catholic Church. In their own words, the Catechism of the Catholic Church says:

> 1999 The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it. It is the sanctifying or deifying grace received in Baptism. It is in us the source of the work of sanctification:[5]

This "infused righteousness" is attained by a work, namely *baptism.* That is the way you get this righteousness. Basically, this position teaches that salvation by grace alone is not enough. You have to add your works and obedience to the work of Christ. It is wrong to think that Roman Catholics do not believe in the *necessity* of grace. Rather, they don't believe in the *sufficiency* of grace. Grace alone is not enough to justify. In their own words from the Council of Trent:

> "If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema," (Council of Trent, Canons on Justification, Canon 9).[6]

Rome, in these words, has denied the gospel of Christ. They place their curse upon the Protestant and biblical doctrine of

justification by faith alone. which is the gospel of our salvation. They have denied justification by faith alone, which I will seek to make a case for below. They confess that faith is necessary, but it is not enough. They confess that grace is necessary, but it is, again, not enough. I assert and will seek to prove that the Bible teaches that faith alone is that which justifies the wicked and not grace/faith *plus* anything in us.

Imputed Righteousness

Christ's *active obedience* is what was imputed to us, which we discussed in chapter 8 (**see here**). His *active obedience* refers to Lord's keeping the Law of God perfectly for us and in our place. All that righteousness which the Lord Jesus earned, the Father credits to us. It is as though we had lived the perfect life of Christ in complete obedience to God. That is how God sees His children. But it is not only His active but also *passive obedience* which justifies us. His *passive obedience* refers to His obedience to the Father even to the point of death and torture. It is through Christ's righteousness and death that we are justified and are in the right with God. Christ provided us a perfect righteousness by perfectly obeying and living the Law of God in our place and He took the penalty of the Law, which was ours, upon Himself. Christ's righteousness is *given* and *credited* to us. It is not mixed and infused with our own righteousness. The apostle Paul says:

> Phil. 3:9 and be found in him, **not having a righteousness of my own** that comes from the law, but that which comes **through faith in Christ**, the **righteousness from God that depends on faith**—

Paul does not find comfort in his own righteousness, which comes through the law and doing "good" things which the law commands. But he finds his comfort, peace, and rest in the righteousness which comes through faith in Christ. This righteousness is from God. It was given to Paul by God and that "through faith in Christ". Charles J. Ellicott notes:

> **But . . . the righteousness which is of God by** (*on condition of*) **faith.**—This verse is notable, as describing the true righteousness; first imperfectly, as coming "through faith of Jesus Christ," a description which discloses to us only its means, and not its origin; next, completely, as "a righteousness coming from God on the sole condition of faith"—faith being here viewed not as the means, but as the condition, of receiving the divine gift (as in Act. 3:16). It may be noted that in the Epistle to the Romans, we have righteousness "through faith," "from faith," "of faith;" for there it was needful to bring out in various forms the importance of faith. Here, now that the urgent necessity has passed, we have the stress laid simply on the opposition of the gift of God through Christ to the merit of the works of the Law; and faith occupies a less prominent, though not less indispensable, position.[7]

In another place, Paul says:

> 1 Cor. 1:30-31 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, **righteousness** and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

The Lord Christ is our righteousness. We do not have a righteousness of our own. Indeed, Isaiah says that all our good works are as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6) and Paul says that none is righteous, no not one (Rom. 3:10). How could we, with our "righteousness", stand before a thrice holy God?! This is the promise of God since of old. Calvin says that by Christ becoming our righteousness, he "means that we are on his account acceptable to God, inasmuch as he expiated our sins by his death, and his obedience is imputed to us for righteousness. For as the righteousness of faith consists in remission of sins and a gracious acceptance, we obtain both through Christ."[8]

Jeremiah speaks of a time when the LORD will become our righteousness (Jer. 23:6). It is He Who forms the basis of our right-standing before and with God. That which will enable us to stand before the throne of God and not be consumed in His wrath is the fact that we have the righteousness of Christ credited to us, which is able to make us stand before the "holy, holy, holy" God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 is inescapable on this point:

> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him **we might become the righteousness of God.**

See our discussion of **this passage** in **chapter 8** for the **substitutionary atonement**.

God was pleased (Isa. 53:10 KJV) to place our sins upon Christ and treat Him as though the Righteous and Sinless had done every sin we have done. There was a purpose for this ("so that"). The purpose is that we should become righteous and this righteousness would be the righteousness of God, not of our own in accordance with the promise of Jeremiah 23:6. Barnes

comments on the above passage, saying:

> **That we might be made the righteousness of God** - This is a Hebraism, meaning the same as divinely righteous. It means that we are made righteous in the sight of God; that is, that we are accepted as righteous, and treated as righteous by God on account of what the Lord Jesus has done. There is here an evident and beautiful contrast between what is said of Christ, and what is said of us. He was made sin; we are made righteousness; that is, he was treated as if he were a sinner, though he was perfectly holy and pure; we are treated as if we were righteous, though we are defiled and depraved. The idea is, that on account of what the Lord Jesus has endured in our behalf we are treated as if we had ourselves entirely fulfilled the Law of God, and bad never become exposed to its penalty. In the phrase "righteousness of God," there is a reference to the fact that this is his plan of making people righteous, or of justifying them.[9]

How amazing is the grace of God that He should give His Son for our pardon and cleansing?! I can stand before the thrice-holy God without being consumed because I am legally pardoned because of what Christ did for me! I, the sinner, am treated like the sinless Son of God!

In Romans 4, Paul largely argues for justification by faith alone by taking the example of David and Abraham. The thesis which he is trying to establish is that justification by faith has always been the way people were saved. Concerning Abraham, he says:

> Rom. 4:22-24 That is why his faith was "**counted to him as righteousness**." 23 But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, 24 but for ours also. It will be **counted to us who believe in him** who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,

This refers to the episode in Genesis 15 where the Lord promises Abram descendants as many as the stars of heaven and Abram believes the promise and then the words which Paul is referring to are declared:

> Gen. 15:6 And he believed the LORD, and he **counted it to him as righteousness**.

In this connection, it is good to take a look at some Greek words which are important for our discussion.

Logizomai and Dikaioo

The Lord counted Abram's faith as righteousness, not any deed he had done (we will discuss the details of this passage **below**). Paul argues that this was the case under the Old Testament and likewise now that Christ has been raised. It is important for us to note the concept of imputed/credited righteousness in Romans 4 and elsewhere. The Greek word used in these instances is the verb λογίζομαι (*logizomai,* G3049), which means "to reckon, count, compute, calculate, count over"[10]. Dr. William D. Mounce says that the "basic meaning of *logizomai* has to do with counting or thinking"[11]. The important distinction between the Protestant and Roman Catholic doctrine of justification has to do with the fact that the Protestant doctrine of justification *declares* the sinner to be righteous although he is not fully righteous, because of Christ's merits. While the Roman Catholic doctrine seeks to make the sinner *righteous* and only then will he be really justified and righteous. But notice that the word which the apostle Paul uses, *logizomai*, has to do with *counting* and *thinking* of someone as righteous instead of *making* them righteous (e.g., Rom. 4:3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11). For all our purposes, as stated at the beginning of this paragraph, justification does not affect our nature or change our inner life; it changes our state from condemned to justified. Robert L. Dabney said:

> We believe that the true meaning is not to make righteous in that sense, but only to declare righteous or false righteous in the forensic sense; and that the act of justification does not change the moral state, but only declares, in the forum of heaven, the legal state of the sinner.[12]

Forensic simply means legal. Theologians often speak of "forensic justification" and mean by it as a legal act of God declaring someone righteous.

The same which was true for *logizomai* is true of the word for justification, δικαιόω (*dikaioo*, G1344). The word is defined by Thayer as "to render righteous or such he ought to be" and "to declare, pronounce, one to be just, righteous, or such as he ought to be"[10]. Mounce gives it the basic definition of "to declare righteous, justify"[13]. Berkhof says:

> This verb means in general "to declare a person to be just. Occasionally it refers to a personal declaration that one's moral character is in conformity with the law, Matt. 12:37; Luke 7:29; Rom. 3:4. In the Epistles of Paul the soteriological meaning of the term is clearly in the foreground. It is "to declare forensically that the demands of the law as a condition of life are fully satisfied with regard to a person, Acts 13:39; Rom. 5:1,9; 8:30-33; I Cor. 6:11; Gal. 2:16; 3:11. In the case of this word, just as in that of *hitsdik*, the forensic meaning of the term is proved by the following facts: (a) in many instances it can bear no other sense, Rom. 3:20-28; 4:5-7; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; 3:11; 5:4; (b) it is placed in antithetic relation to "condemnation" in Rom. 8:33,34; (c) equivalent and interchangeable expressions convey a judicial or legal idea, John 3:18; 5:24; Rom. 4:6,7; II Cor. 5:19; and (d) if it does not bear this meaning, there is no distinction between justification and sanctification.[14]

To further elaborate on the second point (b), Dabney says:

> Because, in a multitude of cases, to justify is the contrast of condemning; e. g., Job 9:20; Deut. 25:1; Rom. 8:33, 34, &c. Now, to condemn does not change, but only declares the culprit's moral condition; it merely fixes or apportions the legal consequence of his faults. Therefore, to justify does not make holy, but only announces and determines the legal relation.[12]

Again we notice in these definitions that the idea is absent of making someone righteous and just through infusion or change of nature. Paul uses this word a lot in his epistles. It is also used in Romans 4, which we were looking at. For example, Romans 4:5 says that "the one who does not work but believes in him who **justifies the ungodly**, his faith is counted as righteousness". Because of faith, which is counted (*logizomai*) as righteousness, the Lord God King of the Universe, declares righteous those who have put their faith in Christ. This is not because they are practically righteous, for God is justifying the *ungodly*. But because of the perfect righteousness of Christ which was imputed to their account whereby God credits to them and thinks of them as righteous because they are united to Christ, the perfectly righteous Man. In further support for our point that *dikaioo* means *declaring* and *counting* one righteous, rather than *making* one righteous, we call upon Luke 7:29. There, the text literally says that the people "justified God" (KJV). Now, what does this mean? Does anyone think that the people *made* God to be righteous? Absolutely not! Rather, as the ESV renders the passage, "they *declared* God just". A. H. Strong observes that justification is a "declarative act":

> Justification, as thus defined [as at the beginning of this paragraph], is therefore a **declarative act**, as distinguished from **an efficient act**; an act of God **external to the sinner**, as distinguished from an **act within the sinner's nature and changing that nature**; **a judicial act**, as distinguished from **a sovereign act**; **an act based upon and logically presupposing the sinner's union with Christ**, as distinguished from an **act which causes and is followed by that union with Christ**.[4]

A little further, Strong observes:

> It is worthy of special observation that, in the passages cited above [Deut. 25:1; Prov. 17:15; Matt. 12:37; Rom. 5:16, 18-19; 8:33-34], the terms "justify" and "justification" are contrasted, not with the process of depraving or corrupting, but with the outward act of condemning; and that the expressions used to explain and illustrate them are all derived, not from the inward operation of purifying the soul or infusing into it righteousness, but from the procedure of courts in their judgments, or of offended persons in their forgiveness of offenders.[15]

The Judge of the Universe, because of the *atoning* death of His Beloved Son on our behalf, declares us to be righteous. Our union with Christ makes it so that His death becomes our death, His resurrection our resurrection, His life our life, His righteousness our righteousness. Although we have not yet been perfectly conformed to His image, we are certainly predestined to that end (Rom. 8:29). In other words, God will *make* us righteous, but this is not what the New Testament speaks about for our salvation. Rather, this is sanctification in which the Holy Spirit works to change us into Christ's image, but it is a life-long process of ups and downs (**see chapter 13**).

Blessings of Justification

What is accomplished by God through justification? *First* of all, as the Confession states, "pardoning their sins" is one of the blessings coming from our justification. For example, Paul says:

> Rom. 4:4-8 Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. 5 And to the one who does not work but **believes in him who justifies the ungodly**, **his faith is counted as righteousness**, 6 just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom **God counts righteousness apart from works**: 7 "Blessed are those whose **lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered**; 8 blessed is the man against whom the **Lord will not count his sin**."

Notice how closely is justification tied to the forgiveness of sins that Paul calls upon **Psalms 32:1-2** as evidence for the fruit of justification. In this passage, we come also to the second blessing of justification, namely, our faith being counted as righteousness (v. 5), or to state it in another way: "accounting and accepting their persons as righteous". We spoke about this above (**see here**). In this connection, we should observe that justification does not only consist of the forgiveness of sins but also is tied to the fact that we are accounted righteous. Matthew Poole comments on v. 5 as follows:

> This testimony is taken out of Psa 32:1, and it is well enough accommodated to the occasion, for those two, to remit sin, and to impute righteousness, are inseparable. The one is put here figuratively for the other. They mistake, who take occasion from hence to make justification to consist only in remission of sin: the text will not bear it. The apostle's design is, not hereby to declare the full nature of justification, which he had done before; but only to prove the freedom of it from any respect to works, in the instance of this principal and essential part of it. Remission of sin and the imputation of righteousness differ, as the cause and the effect. Remission of sin presupposeth imputation of righteousness; and he that hath his sins remitted, hath Christ's righteousness first imputed, that so they may be remitted and forgiven to sinners.[16]

Philip Schaff comments on the blessedness of v. 6:

> **Pronounceththe blessedness;** speaks the congratulation, the pronouncing blessed. The quotation is of forgiveness, of *not* being reckoned a sinner; but the Apostle takes this as equivalent to *the Lord reckoneth righteousness.* 'It is implied by Paul, that the remission of sin is equivalent to the imputation of righteousness, that there is no negative state of innocence, none intermediate between acceptance for righteousness, and rejection for sin' (Alford).[17]

These are the two blessings of justification: forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, by which we are also declared righteous. Albert Barnes further comments on v. 6 in these words:

> **Unto whom God imputeth righteousness -** Whom God treats as righteous, or as entitled to his favor in a way different from his conformity to the Law. This is found in Psa 32:1-11. And the whole scope and design of the psalm is to show the blessedness of the man who is forgiven, and whose sins are not charged on him, but who is freed from the punishment due to his sins. Being thus pardoned, he is treated as a righteous man. And it is evidently in this sense that the apostle uses the expression "imputeth righteousness," that is, he does not impute, or charge on the man his sins; he reckons and treats him as a pardoned and righteous man; Psa 32:2. See the note at Rom 4:3. He regards him as one who is forgiven and admitted to his favor, and who is to be treated henceforward as though he had not sinned. That is, he partakes of the benefits of Christ's atonement, so as not henceforward to be treated as a sinner, but as a friend of God.[9]

In this connection, we also observe that the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of righteousness, also imply that we are freed from the condemnation of the law! Where there is no sin, there cannot be punishment. Furthermore, the case is not only forgiveness and covering of sin, but it is also an accounting of righteousness, which means that we are entitled to the promises of blessings because of this righteousness. Observe how two blessings of justification are beautifully captured in **Romans 4:4-8!** A. H. Strong observes:

> The declaration that the sinner is no longer exposed to the penalty of law, has its ground, not in any satisfaction of the law's demand on the part of the sinner himself, but solely in the bearing of the penalty by Christ, to whom the sinner is united by faith. Justification, in its first element [Remission of punishment or the forgiveness of sins], is therefore that act by which God, for the sake of Christ, acquits the transgressor and suffers [lets] him to go free.[18]

Scripture says "that through this man [the Lord Jesus] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, 39 and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38-39). Forgiveness of

sins and freedom from the demands and curses of the law of Moses go hand-in-hand. **Galatians 3:10-14** also beautifully declares this truth. First, the curse of the law is pronounced upon all who do not abide by it (Gal. 3:10). Then, the observation is made that "it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law" (Gal. 3:11). Rather, as Habakkuk 2:4 said, "The righteous shall live by faith" (Gal. 3:11). Therefore, this means that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law" (Gal 3:13) and for the purpose that "the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:14). This "blessing of Abraham", in context, is justification by faith (**see here**). John Gill observes on this blessing in v. 14 that this is

> The same blessing Abraham enjoyed, even justification by the righteousness of Christ; and what was promised to Abraham, that in him, his seed, that is Christ, the Gentiles should be blessed, or justified; for though this blessing may in general comprise every spiritual blessing, yet it chiefly regards that of justification; or a deliverance from the curse of the law, and which is the end of Christ's being made a curse[19]

Romans 5:18-19 also pronounces these blessings upon us:

> Rom. 5:18-19 Therefore, as **one trespass led to condemnation for all men**, so one act of righteousness leads to **justification and life for all men**. 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 righteous**.

Through the trespass of Adam, the condemnation of the law, which is death, was pronounced and came upon all men. This was the punishment for breaking the Covenant of Works, namely, death (Gen. 2:16-17; see chapter 7 on **the Covenant of Works** and **its curse**)! The opposite of death is life, which means that we have been freed from the curse of Adam (though this does not mean that we have been freed from *physical* death, **see chapter 31** for more on this) and received the blessing of the Covenant of Works, which was eternal life. Furthermore, v. 19 says that the "many [who] were made sinners", will "be made righteous." And this righteousness is "not by their own obedience; nor by their own obedience and Christ's together; but by his sole and single obedience to the law of God: and the persons made righteous by it are not all the posterity of Adam, and yet not a few of them; but "many", even all the elect of God, and seed of Christ; these are all made righteous in the sight of God, are justified from all their sins, and entitled to eternal life and happiness."[19]

As to the meaning of the word "made" in connection to "made sinners" and "made righteous", we understand it to mean as "brought into the state" of sinfulness or the state of "righteousness." Some commentators translate the Greek with "constituted." The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges comments:

> *made sinners ... made righteous*] Better, **constituted**, "put into a position" of guilt and righteousness respectively. Here the whole context points to not a moral change but a legal standing. In Adam "the many" became, in the eye of the Law, guilty; in Christ "the many" shall become, in the eye of the same Law, righteous. In other words, they shall be justified.—"*Shall be made:*"—the future refers to the succession of believers. The justification of all was, ideally, complete already; but, actually, it would await the times of individual *believing.—"Many:"*—lit., in both cases, "the many." See on Rom 5:15.—"*Obedience:*"—here probably the special reference is to the Redeemer's "delight to do the will" of His Father, "even unto the death of the cross." (Psa 40:8; Php 2:8.)[20]

The International Critical Commentary New Testament observes:

> κατεστάθησαν ... κατασταθήσονται: 'were constituted' ... 'shall be constituted.' But in what sense 'constituted'? The Greek word has the same ambiguity as the English. If we define further, the definition must come from the context. Here the context is sufficiently clear: it covers on the one hand the whole result of Adam's Fall for his descendants prior to and independently of their own deliberate act of sin; and it covers on the other hand the whole result of the redeeming act of Christ so far as that too is accomplished objectively and apart from active concurrence on the part of the Christian. The fut. κατασταθήσονται has reference not to the Last Judgement but to future generations of Christians; to all in fact who reap the benefit of the Cross.[21]

What an awesome and amazing grace that should not only grant us the forgiveness of our many sins but constitute and declare us righteous!

The promise of the New Covenant is not merely that our sins are forgiven, but God says "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:34). Not only our past sins, or present sins or future sins; all our sins are and will be

forgiven! This is the glorious promise of God to us (1 John 1:8-9).

Other blessings are connected to justification. Romans 5:1 says that "since we have been justified by faith, we have **peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ." This is not a subjective peace, but an objective peace. We don't have to be afraid of God or the punishment which we deserve, because we are in a state of peace with God. We have been reconciled to Him and He has been reconciled to us (Rom. 5:10). Romans 5:9 says, "Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be **saved by him from the wrath of God**." This means that we do not have to fear the wrath of God against us on the day of judgment or any other day. Our sins have been completely atoned for. We are **adopted** into God's family. In Acts 26:18, Christ tells Paul his mission: "to open their eyes...that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'" This blessing of receiving a place among the believers is also connected with a blessing of justification, namely, the forgiveness of sins. Interesting to notice here is the observation of Berkhof concerning adoption:

> Believers are first of all children of God by adoption. This implies, of course, that they are not children of God by nature, as modern liberals would have us believe, for one cannot well adopt his own children. This adoption is a legal act, whereby God places the sinner in the status of a child, but does not change him inwardly any more than parents by the mere act of adoption change the inner life of an adopted child. The change that is effected concerns the relation in which man stands to God. By virtue of their adoption believers are as it were initiated into the very family of God, come under the law of filial obedience, and at the same time become entitled to all the privileges of sonship. The sonship by adoption should be carefully distinguished from the moral sonship of believers, their sonship by regeneration and sanctification. They are not only adopted to be children of God, but are also born of God. Naturally these two cannot be separated. They are mentioned together in John 1:12; Rom. 8:15.16; Gal. 3:26,27; 4:5,6. In Rom. 8:15 the term *huiothesia* (from *huios* and *tithenai*) is used, which literally means "placing as a son," and in classical Greek is always employed to denote an objective placing in the status of a child. The following verse contains the word *tekna* (from *tikto*, "to beget"), which designates believers as those who are begotten of God. In John 1:12 the idea of adoption is expressed by the words, "But as many as received Him, to them gave He the right (*exousian edoken*) to become children of God." The Greek expression here used means "to give legal right." Immediately thereafter, in the 13th verse, the writer speaks of ethical sonship by regeneration. The connection between the two is clearly brought out in Gal. 4:5,6 . . . "that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons (by adoption), God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father." That Spirit regenerates and sanctifies us and prompts us to address God full of confidence as Father.[22]

Dabney also observes the connection between adoption and justification as a legal act and says:

> Adoption cannot be said to be a different act of grace from justification. Turrettin devotes only a brief separate discussion to it, and introduces it in the thesis in which he proves that justification is both pardon and acceptance. Owen says that adoption is but a presentation of the blessings bestowed in justification in new phases and relations. And this is evidently correct because adoption performs the same act for us, in Bible representations, which justification does: translates us from under God's curse into His fatherly favor because its instrument is the same, faith. (Gal. 3:26, with 4:6, 7; Titus 3:7; Heb. 11:7; John 1:12). And because the meritorious ground of adoption is the same with that of justification, viz., the righteousness of Christ. See Heb. 11:7; Eph. 1:6; and texts above. The chief doctrinal importance of this idea then is, that we have here, the strongest proof of the correctness of our definition of justification, and of the imputed righteousness upon which it is based, in the fact that it is both a pardon and an adoption.[23]

With this, we move to the next point.

Faith is a Gift

The Confession teaches us that we are justified by faith, "which faith they have not of themselves; it is the gift of God." This is a controversial point, especially with Arminians and other non-Calvinists. Calvinists have always insisted that faith is a gift from God given to us and does not have its origin in us or our wills. We don't believe that God believes *for* us, but we believe that it is God Who works faith in our heart and changes our nature so that we are made able to exercise faith in Christ. God gives us faith and we believe. Faith does not originate with us. It is a divine work that lasts until we see Him in heaven. Unless this work of grace takes place, Scripture teaches us that we are both unable and unwilling to come to Christ (**see chapter 6**). Let's take a look at a few passages which Calvinists have used to support the idea that faith is a gift and to see whether this is indeed biblical.

It would be pointless to point to verses that declare that people repented or believed. We do not dispute that. We simply

believe that God is the One Who works in us saving faith through His Holy Spirit. Unless God works faith in man, man will never believe. That is our position. **Ephesians 2:8-9** states—

> For **by grace** you have been saved **through faith**. And **this** is not your own doing; it is the **gift of God**, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

We are saved by God's grace, which comes to us through the channel of faith. This is how we are justified: *by* grace *through* faith. Both are present. But the question here is to what does "this" refer to? The ESV Study Bible says:

> **this**. The Greek pronoun is neuter, while "grace" and "faith" are feminine. Accordingly, "this" points to the whole process of "salvation by grace through faith" as being **the gift of God** and not something that we can accomplish ourselves. This use of the neuter pronoun to take in the whole of a complex idea is quite common in Greek (e.g., 6:1); its use here makes it clear that faith, no less than grace, is a gift of God. Salvation, therefore, in every respect, is **not your own doing**.[24]

The "this" refers to the whole "by grace through faith"; it refers to the whole of our salvation. Neither our faith nor our repentance (2 Tim. 2:26) originate with us, but were given to us by grace (*de*merited favor). Our entire salvation, including faith and repentance (Acts 20:21), was given to us as a gift with the purpose that we would have no ground to boast. In fact, Ephesians 2:10 even says that God beforehand prepared works for us to walk in them. This also is a gift so that we may glorify Him through them. So, even in our good works, we cannot actually boast. Charles J. Ellicott observes that "This attribution of all to the gift of God seems to cover the whole idea—both the gift of salvation and the gift of faith to accept it."[7] The Expositor's Greek Testament observes:

> τῇ γὰρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι: *for by grace have ye been saved*. More exactly "by the grace," *i.e.*, by this grace, the grace already mentioned. *Grace* is the explanation of their own salvation, and how surpassingly rich the grace must be that could effect that!—διὰ τῆς πίστεως: *through faith*. That is, by faith as the instrument or means. Paul never says διὰ τὴν πίστιν, as if the faith were the ground or procuring cause of the salvation. It is the χάριτι, not the explanatory πίστεως that has the first place in Paul's thoughts here.—καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ἡμῶν: *and that not of yourselves*. That is, not as *proceeding from* yourselves or of your own performance...But to what does the τοῦτο refer? To the πίστεως say some (Chrys., Theod., Jer., Bez., Beng., Bisp., Moule, etc.). The neut. τοῦτο would not be irreconcilable with that. The formula καὶ τοῦτο indeed might rather favour it, as it often adds to the idea to which it is attached. It may also be granted that a peculiarly suitable idea results—the opportune reminder that even their *faith*, in which at least they might think there was something of their own, has its origin in God's grace, not in their own effort. But on the other hand the *salvation* is the main idea in the preceding statement, and it seems best to understand the καὶ τοῦτο as referring to that salvation in its entire compass, and not merely to the one element in it, its instrumental cause, appended by way of explanation...[25]

While a bit technical, the point is clear that the "gift relates not merely to faith immediately preceding, but to the whole sentence"[16], which means that our salvation from the first to the last is of God's grace and gift, including faith.

Now we move to the next passage, **Philippians 1:29**—

> For it has been **granted to you** that for the sake of Christ you should not only **believe in him** but also suffer for his sake,

The word *granted* is the Greek lexical form of χαρίζομαι (*charizomai*, G5483), which is basically defined as "to grant as a favor, i.e. gratuitously, in kindness, pardon or rescue".[26] God has not only graciously granted us to suffer for Christ's sake, which is not a reproach, but an honor and an occasion of joy (Acts 5:41; 16:23-25; Matt. 5:10-12; Luke 6:22; Rom. 5:3; 2 Cor. 12:10; Heb. 10:34; Jam. 1:2; 1 Pet. 4:13-16). He has also granted us to *believe in Him!* Just like God has granted and ordained that His children suffer according to His will (1 Pet. 4:19), so likewise He has graciously granted us to believe in the Lord Christ. Our faith did not originate with us, but it was given to us by God for the sake of Christ. Christ has completely propitiated and pleased the Father on our behalf so that all the graces which the Father of mercy sends down upon us have their basis in Christ's active and passive obedience. It has, by grace, been granted to us to believe in the Lord, but also to suffer for His sake because He is worthy! Suffering is the focus in this passage, but "Faith in Christ is here incidentally

spoken of as a grant of Divine grace."[20] As Calvin observed, "Here Paul clearly testifies, that faith, as well as constancy in enduring persecutions, is an unmerited gift of God."[8] This faith which we have been granted is not merely faith that Christ existed, but it is faith *in* Him for salvation. John Gill explains:

> **not only to believe in him for faith in Christ**, which is not merely believing that he is the Christ, and all that is said of him, or all that he himself says, but is a seeing of the Son, a going to him, receiving, embracing, leaning, relying, and living upon him, as God's salvation, is a pure gift of grace; it is not in nature, nor in every man, and in whom it is, it is not of themselves, it is the gift of God; the first implantation of it, all its acts and exercise, its increase, and the performance of it at last with power, are all owing to the grace of God; and this is only given to the elect, for it is a distinguishing gift; it is given to them, and them alone, and, therefore called the faith of God's elect[19]

While confronting the Jewish leaders after Peter healed the lame beggar at the Temple, he said to them in **Acts 3:16**:

> Acts 3:16 And his name—**by faith in his name**—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the **faith that is through Jesus** has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

It is by faith that the lame beggar was healed. Whether the faith was the apostles' or the beggar's is irrelevant for my point. Notice that faith is said to be *in* Jesus' name, but it is also the same faith which is *through* Jesus. The saving, healing and lasting faith was *in* Jesus' name, but it also came *by* and *through* the Lord Jesus. It was something that He gave them to the man and of which He was the author. It originated with Him. It is not merely faith in His name, but also that faith came *through* Him. The Lord Jesus is indeed "the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). He gives it to us, works it in us and He by grace enables us to endure because He gives us a saving faith which endures. Bengel observes:

> Peter sets down not only the act, but even faith itself, to the account of Christ and His name. Through Christ, our faith is of GOD, and tends to GOD. 1Pe 1:21, "Who by Him do believe in God. etc., that your faith and hope might be in God."[27]

This faith is "not only faith, as on Christ as its object, but by and from Christ as its author".[16] See also **Acts 18:27**.

We may also take up a passage which Bengel mentioned—**1 Peter 1:21**:

> 1 Pet. 1:21 who **through him** [Christ] **are believers in God**, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

This is basically the same truth as in Acts 3:16 and also from Peter's mouth. This faith is

> **by him**—Compare "the *faith* which is *by Him,*" Ac 3:16. *Through* Christ: His Spirit, obtained for us in His resurrection and ascension, enabling us to believe. This verse excludes all who do not "by Him believe in God," and includes all of every age and clime that do. Literally, "*are believers* in God." "*To believe* IN (*Greek,* '*eis*') *God*" expresses an *internal* trust: "by believing to love God, going INTO Him, and cleaving to Him, incorporated into His members. By this faith the ungodly is justified, so that *thenceforth* faith itself begins to work by love" [P. LOMBARD].[28]

Philip Schaff observes:

> The object of the belief is elsewhere expressed by the simple dative (Act 16:15, etc.), or by the preposition 'in' (Eph 1:1), but here by the preposition 'toward.' This more forcible phrase, therefore, exhibits the readers not merely as believing, but as raised to the condition of a settled and loyal faith, and as having God Himself, and nothing lower, for the object of this new conviction. And it is 'through Him,' as Peter emphatically reminds them, that they have this new faith. Christ, and only Christ, by all that He had taught and all that He had been on earth, was the means of leading them to this knowledge of God and trust in God.[17]

Peter writes to a congregation and tells them about their faith in **2 Peter 1:1**—

> 2 Pet. 1:1 Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have **obtained a faith of equal standing with ours** by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

The Greek word for *obtained* is pretty interesting. It basically refers to obtaining something through a *lot*. The Greek lexical form λαγχάνω (lagchano, G2975) is defined as "1. to lot, i.e. determine (by implication, receive) especially by lot".[26] The word, in its different forms, is also used in Luke 1:9; John 19:24; Acts 1:17, which obviously refers to casting lots. The basic idea conveyed by Peter through his use of this particular word is, I believe, that the faith which we have did not originate with us. It was as it were by lot—outside of our influence. It was given to us. We obtained it. It is the kind of faith that is the same as the apostles' and it was obtained by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus. Who but God in the Bible controls the results of the lot (Prov 16:33)? One commentary says—

> **obtained**—by grace. Applied by *Peter* to the receiving of the apostleship, literally, "by allotment": as the *Greek* is, Luke 1:9 John 19:24. They did not acquire it for themselves; the divine election is as independent of man's control, as the lot which is east forth.[28]

Charles J. Ellicott observes that "The Greek word implies that they have not won it or earned it for themselves, but that it has been allotted to them."[7]

We may even consider **John 6:44** here:

> John 6:44 **No one can come to me** unless the **Father who sent me draws him**. And I will raise him up on the last day.
>
> John 6:65 And he said, "This is why I told you that **no one can come to me** unless **it is granted him by the Father**."

This is a passage, which we have spoken of in chapter 3 on election (**see here**), but it is also relevant here. There is an inability in man to come to God. It is expressed by the word *can* and not *may*. The Lord Christ is not holding His hand against anyone who would want to come to Him. He is merely mentioning the fact that natural man does not have the ability to come to God. But what does this coming mean? Our answer is found in John 6:35:

> John 6:35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; **whoever comes to me shall not hunger**, and **whoever believes in me shall never thirst**.

When we notice the parallelism in this passage, we understand that coming to Christ is the same as believing in Him. Joseph Benson observes, "*To come to him,* and *believe on him,* are equivalent expressions; or are corresponding terms, explaining each other."[29] The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges also points this parallelism:

> In the remainder of the verse 'He that cometh to Me' = 'he that believeth on Me,' and 'shall never hunger' = 'shall never thirst;' i.e. the believer shall experience the continual satisfaction of his highest spiritual needs. The superiority of Christ to the manna consists in this, that while it satisfied only bodily needs for a time, He satisfies spiritual needs for ever.[20]

Now, going back to John 6:44, we observe that we have an inability to believe except when it is granted and given to us by God.

There is indeed biblical warrant and evidence for the doctrine that faith is a divine gift given to those who are elect, like repentance (Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:26). Our case is further strengthened when we consider the Scriptural teaching on the inability of fallen man to believe (**see here**).

Regeneration Precedes Faith

While this is not directly addressed by the Confession in this section, it is related to the point addressed above, namely, that faith is a gift (**see above**). The question that I want to answer here is: Do we believe to be born again, or are we born again to believe? I will try to argue that the latter is the answer.

Before starting to argue for the Reformed and Calvinistic belief that regeneration precedes faith, it must be noted that here we are speaking about "preceding" not in time, but logically. If we look at it in the sense of time, then both regeneration and faith happen at the same moment. But, the question that we are concerned with is to find which is the cause and which is the effect. Is regeneration the cause of faith, or is faith the cause of regeneration. I found that Matt Slick had a very nice analogy to explain the relationship between regeneration and faith—

> In a light bulb, electricity must be in place in order for light to occur. But, it is not true that light must in place for electricity to occur. The light is dependent on the electricity, not the electricity on the light. Therefore, the electricity is logically first. That is, it must be necessarily present in order for the resultant light to appear. However, the electricity is not temporally first because when the electricity is present, light is the necessary and simultaneous result. When two things are simultaneous, one does not have temporal priority over another. So, when the electricity is present, there is not a duration of time before light occurs. It occurs simultaneously with the presence of the electricity. This is the same with regeneration and faith. Regeneration must precede faith not in a temporal sense, but in a necessary sense. In must be in place in order for believing to occur, but it occurs simultaneously with regeneration. So, logically, regeneration is first. Temporally they are simultaneous.[30]

The Testimony of 1 John 5:1

To prove that regeneration precedes faith, the Reformed often go to 1 John 5:1 and that is also where I will go—

> 1 John 5:1 **Everyone who believes** that Jesus is the Christ **has been born of God**, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.

The ESV is fairly clear on this point, but let us use the Young Literal Translation also to also get the original word order—

> 1 John 5:1 YLT **Every one who is believing** that Jesus is the Christ, **of God he hath been begotten**, and every one who is loving Him who did beget, doth love also him who is begotten of Him:

The case for regeneration preceding faith rests upon the first part of the verse that I highlighted and the use of the verb tenses there. Notice that in the YLT, we can see the tenses much clearer than in other normal English translations, although the verse reads a little bit strange than usual English. The people who are believing, it is a present act of believing. It is something that is happening *now*, it is an active and present faith, not one which is in the past. But, this faith was the *result of an action in the past*. Now we come to the crucial point. The verb γεγέννηται (*gegennetai*, G1080), which has been translated with "has been born" in the ESV and "he hath been begotten" in the YTL is a **perfect passive indicative** in Greek. What does that all mean? Don't worry, we'll take a look at every aspect.

Perfect is the **tense** of the verb and it describes a *state resulting from a finished action*. Or,

> The verb tense used by the writer to describe a **completed verbal action that occurred in the past** but which **produced a state of being or a result that exists in the present** (in relation to the writer).
> The emphasis of the perfect is not the past action so much as it is as such but the present "state of affairs" resulting from the past action.

Thus, the fact that "has been born" is in the perfect tense tells us that γεγέννηται (*gegennetai,* G1080) happened in the *past*, but it has a continuing effect in the *present*. That the **voice of the verb** is **passive** means that the *action of the verb was being done unto the subject* and not by the subject. In the words of Peter, "he has *caused us* to be born again" (1 Pet. 1:3) and God has given us the "right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). The **indicative mood** simply describes *something that is real* according to the author. It is the mood of assertion and fact. Our focus must be on the tense of the verb about which Wayne Grudem says—

> The perfect participle translated here "is born" could more explicitly be translated "has been born and continues in the new life that resulted from that event."[31]

The point which I am trying to get across is that the "believes that Jesus is the Christ" is in the *present active tense*, and

according to the *perfect passive indicative* comes as the result of "has been born of God". The fact that we believe in the *present* is indicative that we have been born again in the *past*. They are connected. The present believing is dependent upon a passive action in the past, namely, that God caused us to be born again. The one precedes the other. Being born of God, which is regeneration, precedes the believing that Jesus is the Christ. Thus, this text explicitly teaches that faith does not precede regeneration, but in fact, faith is a *result* of regeneration. That this is, in fact, the case we look at a couple more similar constructions in John lest people accuse us of using difficult Greek stuff to confound them. In the following examples, it will be very clear to English readers how the construction works.

> **1 John 2:29** If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that **everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him**.

ποιῶν (*poion*, G4160, to make or do), like πιστεύων (*pisteun*, G4100, to have faith) is a *present active participle*. We find the same perfect passive indicative γεγέννηται (*gegenetai,* G1080) here again. It is orthodox and faithful to Scripture to say that the fact that we were born from God was the cause of us doing righteousness (e.g., Eph. 2:8-10; Titus 2:11-14). We do righteousness at the present only because in the past we were born of God. To say otherwise is to make salvation to be by works and not grace, thus a denial of the gospel. The reason why we do righteousness is that we were born of God and we desire to please God (Ezek. 36:25-27). We do ***not*** do righteousness to be born of God. That is works-salvation and that is another gospel!

The same construction is also found in 1 John 3:9, but for our last example, I want to look at **1 John 4:7—**

> 1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and **whoever loves has been born of God** and knows God.

ἀγαπῶν (*agapon*, G25) is again like in the two other passages, *present active participle* and γεγέννηται (*gegenetai,* G1080) is *perfect passive indicative*. The reason that we love is because we were born of God. We do not become regenerate because we love. It is the opposite. See among many other places about love in John's letter 1 John 4:8-12. Love is the effect, not the cause of regeneration.

Now we come back to 1 John 5:1. I believe that we have successfully argued from the similar use of the Greek construction in other passages by John that being "born of God" precedes and results in that one "believes that Jesus is the Christ". 1 John 5:1 is definite and explicit upon the teaching that regeneration precedes faith.

See **Dr. James White, 1 John 5:1, We are Born Again Then We Believe** and **1 John 5:1, Regeneration, Faith, and Tradition Driven Eisegesis**.

The Analogy and Other Considerations

The prime text for regeneration is John 3 and that is our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus. There the Lord tells Nicodemus that he must be born again (John 3:3). What does that analogy mean? I believe it is the fulfillment of the promised New Covenant in Ezekiel 36:25-27. Regeneration is the secret act of God wherein He gives us a new heart and a new spirit. He basically makes us new creatures. That's what regeneration is. Now, going back to the analogy. Nicodemus takes Jesus' words in John 3:3 a little bit too literally when he says "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (John 3:4). But Nicodemus's words express some important things. Although he misunderstood the nature of the new birth, his objection stands. His objection is basically, how can anyone cause himself to be born again? How can he enter into the womb and will himself to be born? Just like with our natural birth, we had nothing to do with it. In all of it, we were passive. We were conceived by our parents without our will being involved and we were born without our will being involved (cf. John 1:12-13). Now we transition to the spiritual realm. Those who believe that faith precedes regeneration would have us believe that people can choose to be spiritually reborn. The problem with this is the testimony of the Bible about unregenerate man's condition:

- dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1, 5; Col. 2:13),
- hates God (Rom. 1:30),
- slave to sin and Satan (John 8:34-36, 44; Eph. 2:2-3; 2 Tim. 2:25-26; Rom. 6:16-17; Titus 3:3),
- does not seek God (Rom. 3:11),
- cannot believe in God (John 10:24-26; 12:37-41;),
- cannot come to Christ (John 6:44),

- the desires and intentions of his heart are evil (Gen. 6:5; 8:21),
- deceitful and desperately sick heart (Jer. 17:9),
- all things he does are sinful (Rom. 14:23; Isa. 64:6),
- cannot accept the things of the Spirit and is unable to understand (1 Cor. 2:14),
- darkened in his understanding (Eph. 4:17-19),
- cannot please God (Rom. 8:5-8).

You can find more verses in this **Scripture List of Total Depravity** or see **chapter 6** of the Confession. This is a summary and not an exhaustive list of the biblical testimony about fallen man.

Now back to the new birth. Those who believe that faith precedes regeneration must first deal with the explicit passages which deny that fallen man can do anything spiritually positive (e.g., Col. 2:14; Rom. 8:7-8; John 6:44). The question we must ask is, "Does God delight and is He pleased with repentance?" and then the negation of that in Romans 8:7-8. Fallen man, says Paul cannot—does not have the ability—to please God and submit to His Law. Is loving God above all else and your neighbor as yourself not the summary of the Law and start of true repentance? Is not the realization that we are hopeless, have sinned against God and need His forgiveness Christianity 101? Is that not pleasing to God and His Law? Yet, that is exactly what those in the flesh are unable to do. The Greek δύναμαι (*dunamai*, G1410) is defined as "to be able, have power whether by virtue of one's own ability and resources, or of a state of mind, or through favorable circumstances, or by permission of law or custom"[10]. Fallen man has a **moral inability** (**see this also**), which we argued for in **chapter 9 on Free Will**.

Can we really say that the man who cannot please God, the one who cannot accept the things of the Spirit Who regenerates man and is unable (δύναμαι, *dunamai*) to understand (Col. 2:14), and the one who cannot (δύναμαι, *dunamai*) come to Christ (John 6:44) is the same who believes and takes the step to believe? One cannot consistently hold these two together. Furthermore, did we not argue that **faith, in fact, was a gift above**? What becomes of these verses?

This is why I believe that it is more consistent with the testimony of Scripture to hold that regeneration, in fact, does precede and gives rise to faith. This would explain the fact why we are now able to believe and put our faith in Christ.

In regeneration, the Sovereign and gracious Spirit of the Almighty gives us a new heart and a new spirit, in a word he makes us new. We become new creations, no longer hostile to God, but now desire the things of God. Our nature is changed. We are made spiritually alive and thus will love the things of God and will believe in God. We are no longer, in the words of 1 Corinthians 2:14, natural people, but spiritual people—indwelt and led by the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:11-13, 15). Our situation prior to regeneration and faith is similar to that of Lazarus. He was stinking in the grave for 4 days. He had no power to raise himself up from the grave. He did not take the first step nor the last step, or any step in between. He was wholly passive through the whole process of him being made alive again. The Lord of glory, the Giver of life Himself, raised him up. There was absolutely no choice of his involved in all of this. When the Lord said, "Lazarus, come out!" (John 11:43). He could not do anything but come out. The Lord imparted life to him without asking his permission or without anything to do with his will, exactly because Lazarus was unable. So it is likewise our condition in our spiritual deadness and slavery to sin. We are not sick in sin, but dead. We are not half-dead, but totally dead to the things of God. It does not mean that we do not do anything, but everything we do in our unregenerate state is sin and leads to death. We cannot do anything good or spiritual as that is not in accords with our fallen and sinful nature. The Lord Christ compares regeneration to spiritual resurrection in John 5:24-26, which presupposes that we were spiritually dead.

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§2 Faith thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification

2. **Faith thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness,** is the **alone instrument of justification; 1** yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever **accompanied with all other saving graces,** and is no dead faith, but worketh by love. **2**
    1. Rom. 1:17; 3:27-31; Phil. 3:9; Gal. 3:5
    2. Gal. 5:6; James 2:17, 22, 26

Faith alone, which is **receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the** only **instrument of justification** (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:9). We are declared righteous by faith alone and not by faith plus our works or anything else. This is Sola Fide. But it should not be thought that this faith is **alone in the person justified**, but **is ever accompanied with all other saving graces** (Gal. 5:6; Jas. 2:17, 22, 26; Titus 2:11-14). We are saved by faith alone, but this faith is not alone. It is not a **dead faith, but worketh by love** (Gal. 5:6). Good works are the fruit of true faith. They

are not a ground of justification, they are fruits which demonstrate our justification.

The Case for Sola Fide

It is by faith alone that we are saved from God's wrath and welcomed into a loving relationship with Him. Faith alone is the instrument, which is given to us by God so that we would be brought into His fold. Manifold are the passages which mention saving faith alone (which is always accompanied by repentance, Acts 20:21) as the condition or instrument of justification. But Roman Catholics may object that the Bible nowhere says "faith alone" and the only places where that phrase appears is in James 2:24 when it's in the negative. We will deal with that below. But when we read of faith being the instrument of justification and in the same verse excluding works, then we are justified (intended pun) to say that the Bible teaches that faith alone is the sole instrument of justification. Romans 3 is my favorite passage on justification. It's clear and to the point. The Holy Spirit says—

> **Rom. 3:28-30** For we hold that one is **justified by faith apart from works of the law**. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since God is one—who will **justify the circumcised by faith** and the uncircumcised **through faith**.

What are the works of the Law but the things that God delights in and has commanded in the Mosaic Law, including the Ten Commandments? But still, Paul says that is not the way that we are justified. That is not the way that we are declared righteous before the thrice holy God. It is by faith. For the Jew and the Gentile, it is the same way whereby comes the equality of Jewish and Gentile Christians (e.g., Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:11ff). The Jews had the idea that justification was through their efforts, but Paul here combats that idea. Justification by works is the essence of all man-made religions and the path to perdition. John Calvin comments on Romans 3:28 with these words:

> He now draws the main proposition, as one that is incontrovertible, and adds an explanation. Justification by faith is indeed made very clear, while works are expressly excluded. Hence, in nothing do our adversaries labor more in the present day than in attempts to blend faith with the merits of works. They indeed allow that man is justified by faith; but not by faith alone; yea, they place the efficacy of justification in love, though in words they ascribe it to faith. But Paul affirms in this passage that justification is so gratuitous, that he makes it quite evident, that it can by no means be associated with the merit of works.[8]

He mentions the evasion which Roman Catholics made (and still make). Poole says:

> **A man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law**; a phrase equivalent to that which is so much spoken against, that we are justified by faith only; as if we should say, That God is to be worshipped, excluding angels, idols, images, &c., it would be as much as to say, God is to be worshipped only.[16]

In Galatians, when Paul is combating the "another gospel" of the Judaizing heretics, he in the same breath is combating against justification by works and teaches *Sola Fide.* The error of the Judaizes was that they added works to the gospel of Christ. They began by requiring the believers to be circumcised, but they did not realize that those who are circumcised were obliged to keep the whole law (Gal. 5:3), therefore, they hinged the justification of the sinner upon his works.

> **Gal. 2:15-16** We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 16 yet we know that a **person is not justified by works of the law** but **through faith** in Jesus Christ, so we also have **believed in Christ** Jesus, in order to be **justified by faith** in Christ and **not by works of the law**, because **by works of the law no one will be justified**.

Do you think that Paul was trying to show that justification by faith? He uses "works of the law" three times in a single verse to deny justification by works! Paul denies the place of works in our justification before God. When all works are excluded, faith alone is sufficient. It is not by the deeds and works of the Law, which are in fact good because they're commanded of God, but not sufficient to declare us righteous and just before God since our good works are filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). The apostle Paul is as emphatic as he can when he points out that "by the works of the law no one will be justified." Works of the law and justification do not go together. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown explain:

> He rests his argument on this as an axiom in theology, referring to Ps 143:2, “Moses and Jesus Christ; The law and the promise; Doing and believing; Works and faith; Wages and the gift; The curse and the blessing—are represented as diametrically opposed” [BENGEL].[28]

Calvin observes that the obvious input of this passage is “justification by faith alone”:

> *But by the faith of Jesus Christ*. He does not merely state that ceremonies, or works of any kind, are insufficient without the assistance of faith, but meets their denial by a statement admitting of no exception, as if he had said, “Not by works, but by the Gift of Christ alone.” In any other point of view, the sentiment would have been trivial and foreign to the purpose; for the false apostles did not reject Christ nor faith, but demanded that ceremonies should be joined with them. If Paul had admitted this claim, they would have been perfectly at one, and he would have been under no necessity to agitate the church by this unpleasant debate. Let it therefore remain settled, that the proposition is so framed as to admit of no exception, “that we are justified in no other way than by faith,” or, “that we are not justified but by faith,” or, which amounts to the same thing, “that we are justified by faith alone.”[8]

Ephesians 2:8-9 is probably one of the most loved passages of the Bible to those who love the fact that they’re saved by faith alone and not works–

> For **by grace** you have been saved **through faith**. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 **not a result of works**, so that no one may boast.

See our discussion above when I argued that this “gift” refers to the whole process of salvation, i.e., faith and repentance, too. But for our present subject, notice how Paul attributes our salvation to that fact that it by grace, i.e., something that we did not deserve and was given to is in spite of us. Grace is not only unmerited favor, but also because of our sin, it is *d*emerited favor. It was by grace and it was through faith. Faith was the instrument through which we were saved. Paul emphatically says that it was not our doing. There was nothing that we did, the purpose of this is to exclude all boasting from humans. God does not want humans to boast in anything but His work and His person (Jer. 9:23-24). That’s why in v. 10 we even read that “we are his [God’s] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” This is said even to exclude boasting after salvation. Even our good works *after* salvation are granted to us by God in grace.

Paul argues that even David and Abraham, under the Old Testament, were justified by faith and not by works:

> Rom 4:5-10 And to the one who does not work but **believes in him who justifies the ungodly**, his **faith is counted as righteousness**, 6 just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts **righteousness apart from works**: 7 “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; 8 blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.” 9 Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that **faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.** 10 How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but **before he was circumcised**.

It is faith in the Messiah that is *counted* by God as if it was our righteousness (**see below for more on this point**). Our faith is in Christ. Under the Old Testament, it was in the promises of God and the types and shadows as they did not have the complete revelation of God yet. But Paul says that even David speaks of justification by faith alone. It is faith which is the lone instrument of this. God counts our belief, trust, confidence, and faith in Him as our righteousness just like He did for Abraham (Gen. 15:6). This was as Paul, again and again, says—apart from works. Works were not into consideration because all of them are as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6) and no one really does anything “good” before a perfectly holy God (Rom. 3:10, 12). Even the father of the faithful, says Paul in v. 10, was justified by faith, how much more his children? But to stress his point, even more, he refers back to the Genesis 15 episode where God makes the covenant with Abraham. The circumcision part had not come yet; that was established in Genesis 17, but Genesis 15:6 says that God counted Abraham’s faith in God and trust in His promises as the means of Abraham’s right-standing before Him. God did not declare Abraham *just* after he was circumcised, but before he was circumcised. He was justified by faith alone apart from works.

We could go on and on, but it is needless. I believe that those verses sufficiently show that works are excluded from salvation. See CARM for more: “**Are we saved by faith alone, or do we need works, too?**” and “**Verses Showing Justification by Faith**”.

Relation Between Faith and Justification

How exactly are faith and justification connected? Are we justified because of our faith? What I specifically want to discuss here is a common mistake which the Reformed has spoken against, namely, that our faith is that which is accounted as righteousness. This case seems strong when we consider Genesis 15:6 and its citations in the New Testament (Rom. 4:3). We will consider the citation of Paul in Romans 4:3 as the starting point of our discussion. Before we do that, it is important for us to lay some terminology which is often used concerning justification.

Instrumental Cause - Protestant theologians often speak of *faith* being the instrumental cause of salvation. By that, they mean that faith is that by which or through which we attain justification. Faith is "thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness". The Scriptures teach that we are:

- justified *by* faith (Rom. 3:28, 30; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; 3:8, 24);
- justified *through* faith (Rom. 3:30; Gal. 2:16);
- "righteousness from God that *depends* on faith" (Phil. 3:9);

Nowhere do we read that we are justified *because* of our faith. A small difference in language, but a huge difference theologically! As an article on Ligonier Ministries beautifully explains:

> Faith alone is the *instrument* that we exercise to lay hold of the *ground* upon which the Lord's verdict of righteousness is pronounced; faith is not the *basis* or *ground* upon which God makes His declaration.[32]

See for more on justification by faith under the heading below.

Meritorious Cause - By meritorious cause, we mean, the ground on which we are justified and accounted righteous. This cannot but be the righteousness of Christ Himself by bearing the penalty of our sin upon Himself and obeying the law of God (i.e., passive and active obedience). We are justified *by* faith *because* of Christ's righteousness.

Now we turn to our initial discussion. As the following discussion will make clear, we are justified by faith alone. But the question which is on my mind now is: What is exactly imputed to us? Is it the righteousness of Christ or our faith? We have already established above that the righteousness of Christ is that which is imputed to us (**see here**). But what about Genesis 15:6 and its repetitions in the New Testament? Doesn't it say that Abraham's faith was counted to him as righteousness? Romans 4:3 says:

> Rom. 4:3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and **it was counted to him as righteousness**."

Let us first observe the surrounding context. This phrase also occurs in vv. 5 ("his faith is counted as righteousness"), 9 ("faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness"), 22 ('his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."'). If we go a chapter earlier, in **Romans 3:22** it is said that "the righteousness of God [is] *through* faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." If we suppose that what is said in Genesis 15:6 and its repetitions is that faith, itself, was regarded as Abraham's and our righteousness, then we basically make faith and righteousness/justification identical. How are we then to read, for example, Romans 3:22? Do we receive the righteousness of God through that which is accounted as our righteousness?

In **Romans 3:25**, we read that the "redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24) is "to be received by faith." And this was to "show God's righteousness" and it also that by which God is shown "just and the justifier who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:25). But if our faith is that which is regarded as our righteousness, then why is it said that Christ's propitiation, which is the basis of the fact that God justifies us, is "to be received by faith"? Christ's propitiation, by which we are accounted righteous, is to be received by that which is "counted to us as righteousness"? That doesn't make sense.

We believe what is meant by "faith" being counted as righteousness is not merely faith in itself, but faith in the Person of Christ and promises of God to Abraham. What the apostle is combating against is justification by works. He adduces Abraham's justification as the evidence against justification by works. Faith, by Paul's definition, is that which receives and is opposed to works (Rom. 3:25; 4:4-5; 10:6). It is also possible to translate the preposition εἰς (*eis*) as "unto righteousness." This would mean that his faith was counted as that which is credited as his righteousness—Christ. This is in accord with the rest of the New Testament and the surrounding context (e.g., Rom. 3:21-22, 25-26; 5:18-19; 1 Cor. 1:30-31; 2 Cor. 5:21). This means

> that God reckoned him righteous, or imputed it to him for righteousness: and the question is, what the it is which was

> counted to him for righteousness? and that this is to be understood, □□□□□ □□, "concerning faith", as R. Solomon Jarchi says, is out of question; for this is expressly said by the apostle, Rom 4:9. The only one is, **whether it means the grace of faith by which he believed; or the object of faith on which he believed**, and with which his faith was conversant: **not the former, for that is not righteousness, nor accounted so; but is distinguished from it**, and **is that by which a person receives and lays hold on righteousness**; besides, whatever may be alleged in favour of the imputation of Abraham's faith to himself for righteousness, it can never be thought to be imputed to others on that account; whereas **the very selfsame it is imputed to others also; see Rom 4:24**; it remains then that **it was the promised seed, the Messiah, and his righteousness, which Abraham, by faith, looked unto, and believed in**, that was made unto him righteousness by imputation. Now since so great and good a man as Abraham was not justified by works, but by faith in the righteousness of the Messiah, it follows, that none of his sons, nor any other person whatever, ought to seek for, or expect to be justified in any other way.[19]

John Gill gives us two points which we may further consider. *First:* that faith and righteousness are distinguished and are to be distinguished. If they were not distinguished then it would be unintelligible to speak of our faith being counted as righteousness for that would be the same as saying our righteousness being counted as righteousness, which is exactly the point the apostle is combating (Rom. 4:2; 3:28). *Second:* that it was not faith itself which was accounted to Abraham as righteousness, but the object of faith, namely, Christ Jesus and His righteousness. Paul had already shown that God's righteousness was to be received *by* faith in Romans 3:24-26. We are justified "by faith", not *because* of our faith or that our faith *is* our justification or righteousness. For this point, Dr. Gill adduces Romans 4:24. In Romans 4:23-24, we read:

> Rom. 4:23-24 But the words "**it was counted to him**" were not written for his sake alone, 24 but for **ours also. It will be counted to us** who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,

Gill's point is that the "it" of Abraham's faith is that which is also "counted to us who believe in him". But if this is simply Abraham's faith in itself, then this is an introduction of a doctrine totally foreign to Scripture. But if what is meant is Christ and His righteousness, then it is indeed the same righteousness of Christ which is imputed to us also. Dabney writes:

> Again: the idea that faith is accounted to us as our justifying righteousness, contradicts, in two ways, that nature which Scripture attributes to it. It is said in many places, that righteousness is by faith, (Rom. 1:17, etc., etc.). Now, then, it cannot be identical with it. Moreover, faith is defined as an act purely receptive, and receptive of Christ our righteousness. John 1:12. Now, that it should be a righteousness when its very nature is to embrace a righteousness, is as contradictory, as that the beggar's confessions of destitution can constitute a price to purchase relief.[33]

Jamieson, Fausset, Brown observe on Romans 4:3:

> Romish expositors and Arminian Protestants make this to mean that God accepted Abraham's act of believing as a substitute for complete obedience. But this is at variance with the whole spirit and letter of the apostle's teaching. Throughout this whole argument, faith is set in direct opposition to works, in the matter of justification—and even in Rom 4:4; Rom 4:5. The meaning, therefore, cannot possibly be that the mere act of believing—which is as much a work as any other piece of commanded duty (John 6:29; 1 John 3:23) —was counted to Abraham for all obedience. The meaning plainly is that Abraham believed in the promises which embraced Christ (Gen 12:3; Gen 15:5, c.), as we believe in Christ Himself and in both cases, faith is merely the instrument that puts us in possession of the blessing gratuitously bestowed.[28]

Therefore, John Piper explains what faith in these passages means:

> He [Paul] means that faith is what unites us with Christ and all that God is for us in him. When God sees faith in Christ, he sees union with Christ. And when he sees union with Christ, he sees the righteousness of Christ as our righteousness. So faith connects us with Christ who is our righteousness and, in that sense, faith is counted as righteousness. Faith sees and savors all that God is for us in Christ, especially his righteousness. That's what faith does.[34]

In these passages, faith is "not considered in itself as a work, but in relation to Christ, the object of it, and as an act of receiving and applying him; as eating nourisheth, though it be the meat that doth it"[16] (com. on Rom. 4:5). The Baptist John L. Dagg writes concerning this:

> Nothing can be accounted the meritorious cause of justification, but the obedience and sufferings of Christ: yet faith is indispensable: “He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; and the wrath of God abideth on him.” [John 3:16] By him all that believe are justified. [Acts 13:39] Faith, then, is the turning point, by which a sinner’s condition is determined. In God’s method of grace, all the benefits of Christ’s satisfaction to the law are made over to the sinner, as soon as he believes: and faith, therefore, serves to him instead of a perfect personal obedience to the law. **On his believing in Christ, he is treated as if he had personally rendered a perfect obedience to the law**: and **this is the import of those Scriptures which say that faith is imputed to him for righteousness**. It is not so imputed, because of any merit which it possesses; but because it is that which the Gospel recognises [sic] in the sinner as entitling him to the full satisfaction that Christ has rendered. When faith is said to be imputed for righteousness, **the obedience and sufferings of Christ, on which faith lays hold, are viewed as connected with it**, and constituting the meritorious ground of its acceptance.[35]

On this happy note, we close this section.

Faith and Works

Usually, the Roman Catholic would object to the case made above and go to James 2:24 where it is stated that “a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.” What is the context and what is James trying to communicate here? Does he say that we must work for our salvation? I do not believe so, otherwise, that would make the Bible contradictory with itself and that is something which both positions do not believe. Let us then take a look at that passage.

It is necessary to begin our discussion from v. 14 and not to jump straight into v. 24 with no consideration of what the context is and what came before. Is he saying that we are justified by works and faith before God or something else?

> Jas. 2:14-17 What good is it, my brothers, **if someone says** he has faith but does not have works? Can **that faith** save him? 15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? 17 So also **faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead**.

You see, the discussion should not begin at v. 24 if you want to get the correct and consistent understanding of the passage but begin at v. 14 or even 1:1 to get the whole context. But it is sufficient and good if we begin here. James starts by asserting what does it matter if one merely says he has faith. “If someone says” that they’re Christian, but do not bear “fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matt. 3:8), their faith is empty. They are merely saying that they’re Christians, but, in fact, do not give any evidence that they are followers of Christ. Furthermore, James points back to the fruitless faith of that person saying, “Can *that faith* save him?” The question, therefore, is not can faith alone save, but it is can a *fruitless* faith save? You see, the whole discussion should be framed in regards to this point that James is trying to refute the idea that because “someone [merely] says” that they’re justified and have faith means that they’re justified. Saying that one is justified and a believer, does not, in fact, mean that they are truly justified and are true believers. That is what is James combating here.

Galatians 6:10 encourages us to do good and help people, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul is clear on justification by faith alone, yet the faith that justifies always works out in love. Now notice what is said in James 2:15-16: those who claim that they have faith, do not, in fact, obey Paul’s exhortation to do good, especially to their brothers and sisters in the Lord and therefore they do not give any evidence that saving faith resides within them. Their entire “faith” is merely their assertion that they have faith with no evidence. On this basis, James says in v. 17 that if this is what you think faith is, i.e., merely the assertion without the accompanying fruit, then *that* “faith” that you actually have is dead, false and fake. It is useless; it is not going to help you. It is not saving faith. John Gill notes on James 2:14 as to the kind of faith that the apostle is combating here:

> **though a man say he hath faith, and have not works?** it is clear that the apostle is not speaking of true faith, for that, in persons capable of performing them, is not without works; it is an operative grace; it works by love and kindness, both to Christ, and to his members; but of a profession of faith, a mere historical one, by which a man, at most, assents to the truth of things, as even devils do, Jas 2:19 and only says he has faith, but has it not; as Simon Magus, who said he believed, but did not.
>
> **Can faith save him?** such a faith as this, a faith without works, an historical one, a mere profession of faith, which lies only in words, and has no deeds, to show the truth and genuineness of it...[19]

Philip Schaff points our attention to the article in Greek connected to the word “faith”, as it is in the ESV, “that faith”:

can faith save him? The article in the Greek must here receive its full force—literally, 'Can the faith save him?' that is, the particular faith which such a man possesses—'this faith.' Faith certainly does save; nothing can be more evidently the doctrine of Scripture than that our salvation is attached to faith; but not the faith to which James here alludes: **Can this faith save him?—this dead, barren faith; this mere speculative belief in the doctrines of the Gospel**.[17]

We keep our faith alive by acting out on our faith and bearing the fruit that comes from the fact that the Spirit is within us. We want to do good works so that our Father would be glorified (Matt. 5:16). We want to do the good works, which the God Who saved us by grace and through faith, had prepared for us from eternity (Eph. 2:10).

Jas. 2:18-19 But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will **show you my faith by my works**. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

Again, we continue with what we established before: the mere claim of possession of faith and the actual possession of faith. We are justified by the *possession* of faith, not by the mere *profession* of faith. Faith is something that is internal between oneself and God, it is not something visible to others. But there is a way in which true faith can be seen, namely, by our deeds to the glory of God. God knows if we have true and saving faith because He knows everything and knows us better than ourselves, but people cannot know if we have true saving faith. The only way for them to have an idea if we have faith is to observe our walk of life and our deeds. That's the reason that James says that it is impossible to demonstrate your faith before people without your works, i.e., the fruits of your repentance and faith (Matt. 3:8; Acts 26:20). The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges observes on James 2:17, where it is said that faith without works is dead, that

The assent to a dogma, beginning and ending in itself, has no power to justify or save. St Paul's language in Rom 2:13 shews that he was in substantial agreement with St James.[20]

Showing my faith by my works means that "I will furnish in this way the best and most certain proof of the existence of faith. It is implied here that true faith is adapted to lead to a holy life, and that such a life would be the appropriate evidence of the existence of faith. By their fruits the principles held by men are known."[9] Jamieson, Fausset and Brown observe on the meaning of showing our faith in James 2:18:

show me thy faith without thy works—if thou canst; but thou canst not SHOW, that is, *manifest* or *evidence* thy alleged (Jas 2:14, "say") faith without works. "Show" does not mean here to *prove* to me, but *exhibit* to me. Faith is unseen save by God. To *show* faith to man, works in some form or other are needed: we are justified judicially by God (Ro 8:33); meritoriously, by Christ (Isa 53:11); mediately, by faith (Ro 5:1); evidentially, by works. The question here is not as to the *ground* on which believers are justified, but about the *demonstration* of their faith: so in the case of Abraham. In Ge 22:1 it is written, God did *tempt* Abraham, that is, put to the *test of demonstration* the reality of his faith, not for the satisfaction of God, who already knew it well, but to *demonstrate* it before men. The offering of Isaac at that time, quoted here, Jas 2:21, formed no part of the *ground* of his justification, for he was justified previously on his simply believing in the promise of spiritual heirs, that is, believers, numerous as the stars. He was then justified: that justification was *showed* or manifested by his offering Isaac forty years after. That work of faith *demonstrated,* but did not contribute to his justification. The tree *shows* its life by its fruits, but it was alive before either fruits or even leaves appeared.[28]

The context of James' discussion is **not justification before God**, rather the discussion is the **demonstration of your justification and faith before people**. James is not concerned here with what dwells inside a believer, but his discussion concerns those who profess the faith but do not act like it. It is those people who cannot demonstrate their justification before men.

Jas. 2:20-26 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that **faith apart from works is useless**? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified 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 counted 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.**

The discussion continues. The profession of faith is useless without works by which you can demonstrate the genuineness of your faith. Now we get to the justification of Abraham. Paul has clearly argued in Romans 4 that Abraham was justified by faith apart from works (**see above**). But what is James speaking about here? We have already argued that the discussion of James concerns the **demonstration of our faith before people**. It is not about whether we have saving faith or not before God. God knows our hearts and knows if we have true faith; people don't. The way they can see that is through our fruit (Luke 6:44).

In v. 21, James declares that Abraham was justified by his works. This means that he was justified by his works "*evidentially,* and *before men* (see on Jas 2:18). In Jas 2:23, James, like Paul, recognizes the Scripture truth, that it was his *faith* that was counted to Abraham for righteousness in his justification before God."[28] Matthew Poole also comments on the phrase "justified by works" in this verse:

> **Justified by works;** found or declared to be justified, not only before God, but in the face of the world; and his faith (by which he had been justified above thirty years before in the sight of God) now approved as a true, lively, justifying faith, by this proof he gave of it, upon God's trying him in the offering up his son, Gen 22:9,12[16]

In v. 22, James argues that when Abraham offered Isaac his faith was completed by his works, i.e., obedience to God even at this point. His faith was active and, in fact, it was as Hebrews says what inspired him to do what he did (Heb. 11:17-19). His faith was the driving force of his obedience. That Abraham's faith was completed by his works" means that it was "Made complete, finished, or entire. It was so carried out as to show its legitimate and fair results."[9] Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown give a great explanation of this with passages which demonstrate their case:

> **by works was faith made perfect**—not was *vivified,* but attained its *fully consummated development,* and is *shown to be real.* So "my strength is *made perfect* in weakness," that is, *exerts itself most perfectly,* shows how great it is [CAMERON]: so 1 John 4:17; Heb 2:10; Heb 5:9. The germ really, from the first, contains in it the full-grown tree, but its perfection is not attained till it is matured fully. So Jas 1:4, "Let patience have her *perfect work,*" that is, have its *full effect* by showing the most perfect degree of endurance, "that ye may be perfect," that is, *fully developed* in the *exhibition* of the Christian character. ALFORD explains, "Received its realization, was entirely exemplified and filled up." So Paul, Php 2:12, "Work out your own salvation": the salvation was already in germ theirs in their free justification through faith. It needed to be *worked out* still to fully developed perfection in their life.[28]

Works do not make faith real, but they demonstrate that it's real. Abraham's faith was not false or not genuine before the attempted sacrifice of Isaac. But his willingness to go through it showed that his faith was genuine and that nothing was too precious for him to offer up to God. We have already argued, as Paul does himself, a better interpreter than me, that Abraham was justified by faith apart from works in Romans 4. But what James is saying here is that Abraham's possession of true saving faith was *demonstrated* by his obedience to God. In this, he demonstrated that he truly believed God in everything that he said and that he would have even given his son for God. He demonstrated before all that he truly *possessed* true faith and not merely *professed* it.

In v. 23, James says that the Scripture was fulfilled—it came practically to life. Barnes observes that this means "That...the fair and full meaning of the language of Scripture was expressed by this act, showing in the highest sense that his faith was genuine; or the declaration that he truly believed, was confirmed or established by this act. His faith was shown to be genuine; and the fair meaning of the declaration that he believed God was carried out in the subsequent act."[9] Abraham, by his obedience to God's command, demonstrated to all that he possessed true saving faith in God Almighty and did not withhold his beloved son. Notice also that James does not deny that Abraham's justification before God was by his faith, as Genesis 15:6 testifies. Calvin also comments on this passage and it is helpful to hear what he says:

> They who seek to prove from this passage of James that the works of Abraham were imputed for righteousness, must necessarily confess that Scripture is perverted by him; for however they may turn and twist, they can never make the effect to be its own cause. The passage is quoted from Moses. (Gen 15:6.) The imputation of righteousness which Moses mentions, preceded more than thirty years the work by which they would have Abraham to have been justified. **Since faith was imputed to Abraham fifteen years before the birth of Isaac, this could not surely have been done through the work of sacrificing him.** I consider that all those are bound fast by an indissoluble knot, who imagine that righteousness was imputed to Abraham before God, because he sacrificed his son Isaac, who was not yet born when the Holy Spirit declared that Abraham was justified. It hence necessarily follows that something posterior is pointed out here.

> Why then does James say that it was fulfilled? Even because **he intended to shew what sort of faith that was which justified Abraham; that is, that it was not idle or evanescent, but rendered him obedient to God, as also we find in Heb 11:8.** The conclusion, which is immediately added, as it depends on this, has no other meaning. Man is not justified by faith alone, that is, by a bare and empty knowledge of God; he is justified by works, that is, his righteousness is known and proved by its fruits.[8]

Then comes the crucial statement in v. 24, which should be understood in light of the previous discussion. Indeed, we are not justified *before men* merely by faith, but by works also. The second definition for δικαιόω (*dikaioo*) given by Thayer's Greek Definitions (G1344) is "to show, exhibit, evince, one to be righteous, such as he is and wishes himself to be considered."[10] Abraham did show himself as righteous and justified before people by his obedience to God. He demonstrated that he possessed saving faith. If we have carefully followed the text thus far, then reading "that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone" does not have as much force as it would have done if we extracted v. 24 from its context. The point of v. 24 is that "no man will be justified who has not a faith which will produce good works, and which is of an operative and practical character."[9] It is also helpful to notice that in all this discussion, James "never denies Justification by Faith; but that fancied one of idle, speculative, theoretic faith, with no corresponding acts of love."[7] Philip Schaff also notices this point:

> The meaning is, 'not by faith simply,'—by a faith without works, which cannot justify either in whole or in part. It must be carefully observed that James does not deny that a man is justified by faith; on the contrary, he presupposes this truth, as without faith there can be no works, in the sense in which he employs the term works; he only asserts that justifying faith must not be alone, but must be productive of works.[17]

In the same way as Abraham, the example of Rahab (Jas. 2:25) when she received and helped the Israelite spies because of the LORD's fame which had reached Jericho. Hebrews 11:31 says that "**By faith** Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies." Notice the stress that the Holy Spirit lays upon her faith. Barnes observes that "Her act showed that she truly believed God. If that act had not been performed, the fact would have shown that her faith was not genuine, and she could not have been justified. God saw her faith as it was; he saw that it would produce acts of obedience, and he accepted her as righteous. The act which she performed was the public manifestation of her faith, the evidence that she was justified."[9]

So, James concludes that just as the human body without the spirit lies in the dust and returns to dust, in the same way, faith without works is dead and useless. It is not saving and true faith. Saving and true faith always works itself out in love and good works (e.g., Eph. 2:8-10; Phil. 2:11-12; Titus 2:11-14; Heb. 13:20-21). Barnes observes:

> There is as much necessity that **faith and works should be united to constitute true religion**, as there is that the body and soul should be united to constitute a living man. **If good works do not follow, it is clear that there is no true and proper faith**; none that justifies and saves. If faith produces no fruit of good living, that fact proves that it is dead, that it has no power, and that it is of no value. This shows that James was **not arguing against real and genuine faith, nor against its importance in justification**, but **against the supposition that mere faith was all that was necessary to save a man, whether it was accompanied by good works or not**. He maintains that **if there is genuine faith it will always be accompanied by good works**, and that it is only that faith which can justify and save. If it leads to no practical holiness of life, it is like the body without the soul, and is of no value whatever.[9]

Calvin observes that faith without works is like a dead body which can do nothing:

> The meaning is not, that works are to faith what the spirit is to the body, for that would make works to be the life of faith, the reverse of the fact; but the meaning is, that faith having no works is like a dead carcass without life.[8]

Schaff observes that "what James insists on here is not the deadness of works without faith, but the converse, the deadness of faith without works. According to him, a faith without works is like a body from which the living principle has departed; works are the evidences of life, and if these be absent, the faith is dead. A mere system of doctrine, however correct, is a mere dead body, unless it be animated by a living working spirit."[17]

What we must understand from this discussion is the fact that we are saved by faith alone, but *saving faith is never alone*. It is always accompanied by the fruits which are the effects of faith. Again and again, we read in the New Testament of doing good works without any contradiction to the doctrine of justification by faith alone (1 John 3:8; Gal. 5:13; Jas. 2:14-15; 1 Pet.

1:22; 2:12; 3:1, 16; 1 Tim. 2:10-11; 5:9-10; 6:17-18; Titus 2:7-8, 13-14; 3:7-8, 14; Heb. 10:24). A faith that is a true and saving faith always works itself out in good works (Titus 3:7-8).

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§3 Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are justified

3. Christ, by his **obedience** and **death**, did **fully discharge the debt of all those that are justified;** and did, by the sacrifice of himself in the blood of his cross, **undergoing in their stead the penalty due unto them,** make a proper, real, and **full satisfaction to God's justice in their behalf;** **1** yet, inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them, **2** and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead, **3** and both freely, **not for anything in them,** their justification is only of free grace, **4** that both the exact justice and rich grace of **God might be glorified in the justification of sinners**. **5**
    1. Rom. 5:8-10, 19; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; Heb. 10:10, 14; Isa. 53:4-6, 10-12
    2. Rom. 8:32
    3. 2 Cor. 5:21; Matt. 3:17; Eph. 5:2; Rom 3:26
    4. Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:6-7
    5. Rom. 3:26; Eph. 2:7

How did Christ **fully discharge the debt of all those that are justified**? **By His obedience and death** (Rom. 5:8-10, 18-19). This is again a reference to His active and passive obedience (**chapter 8:5**). By **the sacrifice of Himself**, He underwent **in their stead the penalty due unto them** (Gal. 3:13; Isa. 53:4-6, 10). This, He did so that He would **make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice on their behalf.** God does not simply forget or ignore our sins. His justice demands that payment be made for our wrongdoing. This, God, has accomplished in Jesus Christ Who paid our debt and underwent the punishment which we deserved. Both **His obedience and satisfaction** (i..e, active and passive obedience) are **accepted in their stead**. The active and passive obedience of Christ is the ground of our justification and peace with God. Both the active and passive obedience of Christ are credited to us **freely, not for anything in them**. This shows us absolutely that our **justification is only of free grace**. Prior to justification God would see our "good works" as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6) and would see that we do not desire Him (Rom. 3:9; 8:7-8). Therefore, there is nothing that would move Him to declare us righteous for anything in us. We were not righteous. But if it is **only of free grace** then the reason for why we are justified does not lie with us, but with Him alone. God is **glorified in the justification of sinners** both in His **exact justice** as well as His **rich grace** (Rom. 3:26). He exacted justice upon Christ and thereby showed that He cares about His law, His glory, His holiness, and His justice. And through His justice and punishment of Christ, He lavished upon us the richness of His mercy and grace. We are freely justified by His grace, but His grace was not free. The cost of grace was the blood of Jesus Christ.

By Obedience and Death Fully Discharged The Debt

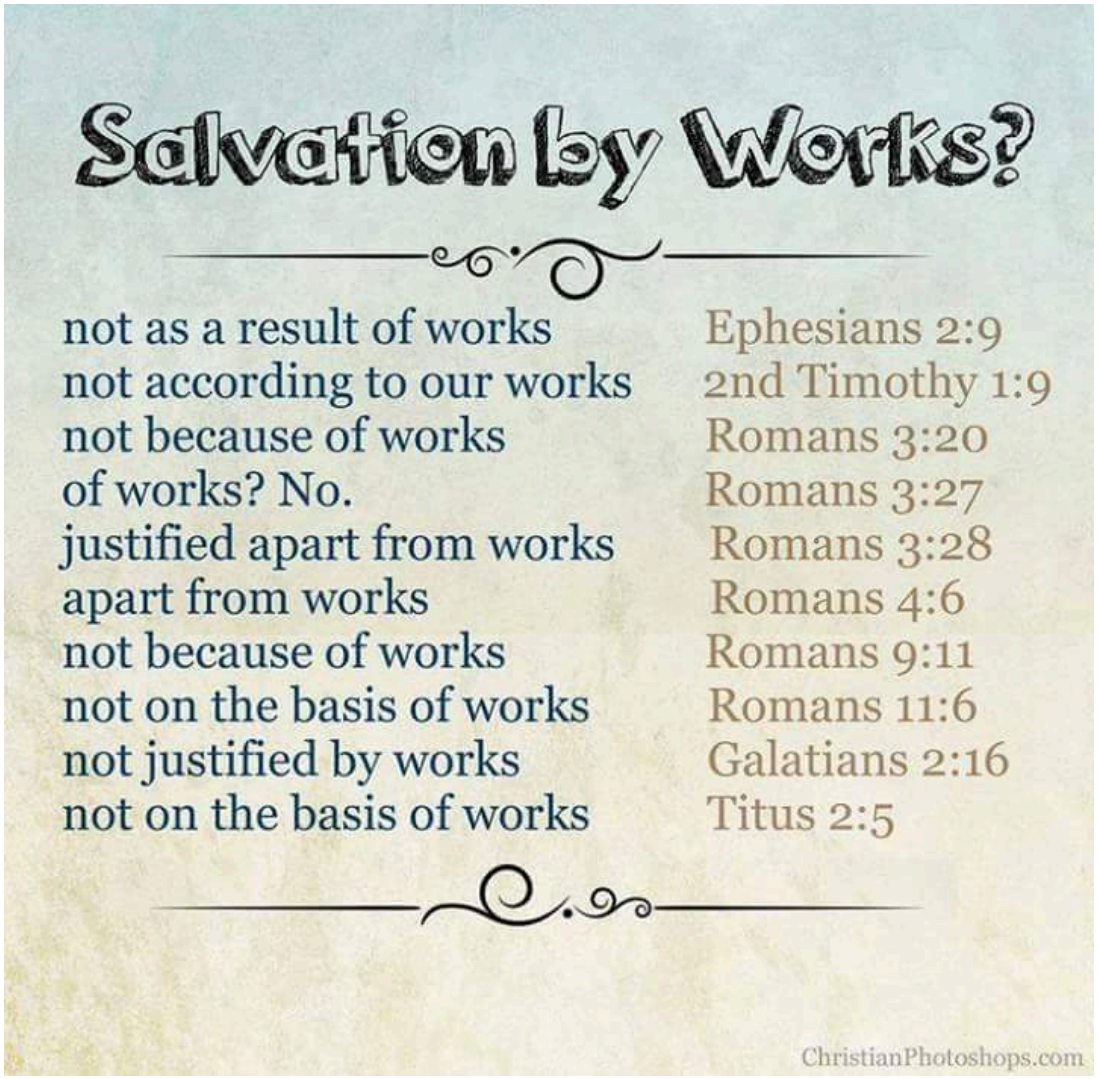
Active Obedience refers to Christ's perfect obedience to the Law on our behalf and the **Passive Obedience** refers to the atonement on our behalf. The interested reader is referred to **chapter 8** for these two points.

Substitutionary Atonement

We have largely argued for the **Substitutionary Atonement** and **Definite Atonement** in chapter 8.

Not From Anything in Them

That could be seen from the fact that we have been elected by God from all eternity, that is the doctrine of **Unconditional Election**, which I sought to make a case for in **chapter 3**. But also from my exposition of **Romans 9:11 in chapter 10** on the **Effectual Call** where I tried to show that God's election and calling were not based on anything in us. But also from many passages that distance our works from our salvation. I'll spare you and me the time on this point by simply pointing you to the following picture—



God Glorified In Justification

> Rom. 3:25-26 whom [Christ] God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to **show God's righteousness**, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to **show his righteousness** at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

The purpose that Christ was put forward as a propitiation, i.e., a sacrifice that satisfies God's wrath and turns in into His favor, was to demonstrate, first of all, His righteousness. It was for His glory. God has chosen us and saved us for His own glory, not because we are good or we are sinless. It was to demonstrate His infinite glory. This could be seen in a classic Old Testament text as Ezekiel 36 where God promises to save His people and promises the New Covenant—

> Ezek. 36:22-23 "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is **not for your sake**, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but **for the sake of my holy name**, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. 23 And **I will vindicate the holiness of my great name**, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you **I vindicate my holiness** before their eyes.

God wants to vindicate the holiness of His Name. His people have misrepresented Him and He will clear up the mess that His people have made of His holy name. The first goal for which the Lord will act is the glory of His name. For His Name, He will act, not because of man, in the first place. But He wants to vindicate the glory of His Name, which is His worth, His person and everything about Him. So likewise in Romans 3, the reason that Christ the Lord was put forward as a propitiation was to demonstrate God's righteousness. How so? God passed over the sins of the elect under the Old Testament without the sacrifice of Christ, but now that the sacrifice of Christ is made the Lord is demonstrated as the Just One who has already provided the sacrifice which turns away His wrath from the sins of the saints in the Old Testament. In a sense, Satan could have raised the charge against God that He was unjust for letting David into heaven while the sacrifice of Christ was not

made. But once the sacrifice was made in whose light and on whose basis David's sins were blotted out, there was no longer any basis for an accusation from Satan. God's justice was demonstrated.

But how is God's justice then demonstrated in mercy and grace? Proverbs 17:15 says that "He who **justifies the wicked** and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an **abomination to the LORD**." So, how can God justify the wicked, i.e., sinners and those who are not righteous, without Himself being an abomination?! This is the problem that Paul is actually dealing with in Romans 3:25-26. The solution to the problem is found in Christ being the propitiation. This means that God put forward Christ so that He would bring upon Him the punishment deserved for everyone who would believe. God did indeed justify the wicked, but His wrath against their sins was satisfied in the Substitute. He did not merely ignore their sins and justify them, that would have been an abomination. Rather, God punished their sins in the Substitute. God's wrath was satisfied against their sins. God was propitiated. It is in this way that God is just and the justifier. God will do justice against all those who do not repent by sending them to hell to pay for their sins. But He is also the justifier of the ungodly because He has poured out His wrath, which He had against the elect, on His Son, the perfect and spotless Substitute.

God's desire in all of this is to show that salvation only belongs to Him. It only comes through His efforts, not anything in humans., so that no one would have a basis to boast. God desired to show His righteousness and He indeed does show His righteousness. He is righteous in punishing the guilty and He is righteous in saving the elect because a Substitute paid their debt. God planned for salvation to be in this way, i.e., that it would be in Christ and by grace through faith so that no man could say that he contributed anything to his salvation.

> 1 Cor. 1:30-31 And **because of him you are in Christ Jesus**, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, **boast in the Lord**."

It is because of God that we are believers and we have been justified. The righteousness of Christ is credited to us and God sees us as righteous and spotless in Christ. Why? So that we would boast only in the Lord. Justification is by grace and through faith so as to exclude boasting (Eph. 2:8-9). God is jealous for His glory and He will give it to no other.

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§4 God did from all eternity decree to justify all the elect

4. **God did from all eternity decree to justify all the elect,** **1** and **Christ did in the fullness of time die for their sins,** and **rise again for their justification;** **2** nevertheless, they are not justified personally, until the **Holy Spirit doth in time due actually apply Christ unto them.** **3**
    1. Gal. 3:8; 1 Peter 1:2, 19-20; Rom. 8:30
    2. Gal. 4:4; 1 Tim. 2:6; Rom. 4:25
    3. Col. 1:21-22; Gal. 2:16; Titus 3:4-7; Eph. 2:1-3

God had **from all eternity** determined **to justify all the elect** (Rom. 8:30). To do so, He likewise decreed that Christ **in the fullness of time die for their sins, and rise again for their justification** (Gal. 4:4; Rom. 4:25). What is important to notice is that it says that **God did from all eternity decree** and not actually justify the elect from all eternity. They are **justified personally** only when **the Holy Spirit doth in time due actually apply Christ unto them** (Titus 3:4-7). We are justified by faith and not election. Election ensures that we will be justified, but it is not the instrument of justification.

The Work of the Trinity

One of the best ways for me to understand the Trinity and see the Trinity in action is in the redemption of man. The Father plans the redemption, the Son accomplishes the redemption and the Holy Spirit applies the redemption. The work of all three Persons of the Blessed Trinity may **be seen in** Ephesians 1. Verses 3-6 speak of the work of the Father, vv. 7-12 of the work of the Son, and vv. 13-14 speak of the work of the Spirit.

It is **God the Father** Who chose us before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3-6). It is He Who planned our salvation from all eternity (2 Tim. 1:9). It is He Who foreknew us, predestined us, called us, justified us and will glorify us (Rom. 8:29-30). It is the Father, says the Lord Jesus, Who draws us to Him so that we are saved (John 6:44). It is the Father Who sent the Son on a mission (John 3:16; 17:3-5). It is He Who adopts us to become His children (Eph. 1:5; 1 John 3:1; Rom. 8:14-17). It is the Father Who planned the redemption of the elect. It is the Father Who ordained the cross of Christ from all eternity (Acts

2:23; 4:27-28; Isa. 53:10) which is the means and ground by which we are saved from His wrath.

It is **God the Son** Who perfectly obeys the Father in accomplishing all that the Father had sent Him for (John 17:3-5). It is He Who laid down His life for all His sheep (John 10:14-15). It is He Who gives life to all whom the Father has given Him (John 17:2). It is He Who prays for His own (John 17:9). It is He who intercedes for the elect (Rom. 8:34). It is He Who mediates between the Father and sinful man (1 Tim. 2:5). It is in and through Him that our redemption is found (Eph. 1:7). It is by His blood that we are cleansed and bought (1 Cor. 6:19-20; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). It is to Him that the Father draws us (John 6:44). It is He Who raises all those given to Him by the Father on the last day (John 6:37-40). It is He Who keeps us in faith and in His hands (John 6:39; 10:27-28).

It is **God the Spirit** Who applies to us the work accomplished by the Son. It is He Who convicts us of our sin (John 16:8). It is He Who regenerates us (Ezek. 36:25-27; John 3:5-8; Titus 3:5) and thus gives us the new life in Christ. It is He Who applies the words of Christ to us. Without Him, they're empty words but He makes them living and regenerates us (John 6:63). It is His person that we receive the moment we believe (Acts 2:38). The Spirit dwells in us (Rom. 8:9; John 3:16; 14:17; 2 Tim. 1:14). We are sealed by the Spirit the moment we believe (Eph. 1:13-14). It is He Who guides us into all truth (John 16:13). We are led by the Spirit (Rom 8:14; Gal 5:18). The Spirit sanctifies us (1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2). The Spirit makes us more like Christ and transforms us (2 Cor. 3:18). The Spirit prays with us and for us (Rom 8:26-27). The Spirit bears witness to us that we are redeemed and are children of the living God (Rom 8:16). The Spirit works fruits in us (Gal. 5:22-23). The Spirit gives spiritual gifts to the body (1 Cor. 12:4, 8-10; Heb. 2:4). The Spirit gives life to our mortal bodies (Rom. 8:11). The Spirit reveals the deep things of God to us (2 Cor. 2:10). It is in the Spirit that we are spiritually baptized into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). It is through the Spirit that we have access to the Father (Eph 2:18). There are many more things that the Spirit does for those whom Christ has purchased.[36]

Here we see the perfect work of the Triune God in the redemption of the elect. Christ obtained all that was necessary for the redemption of the elect 2000 years ago on the cross, yet the benefits which Christ has obtained are not directly applied, rather in God's timing, those who were before the foundation of the world in the Son chosen, are regenerated by the Spirit and changed from children of wrath into children of the living God.

Justified in Time

Antinomians and some Calvinists taught that the believer's justification took place in eternity. There was not a time when we were not justified. We simply did not acknowledge our justification until the moment of faith. Therefore, the Confession stresses that our justification did not take place before the Holy Spirit applied the work of Christ unto us. Some notable names on the Calvinist side who held such a defective view are John Gill and Abraham Kuyper. (I have not yet read anything in John Gill's commentary where he articulates eternal justification.) The contention of those on the "justification from eternity" side is that faith itself is a fruit of justification by which we come to realize that we are justified. Theologians have rightly observed that this undermines justification *by faith* since some of its proponents teach that faith itself is a gift of justification. The Biblical teaching is that justification is *by* faith. There is no justification without faith and this justification is received through the instrumentality of faith. Galatians 2:16 says that "we also have believed in Christ Jesus, **in order** to be justified by faith in Christ". This means that without faith one could not have been justified. Romans 3:28 teaches that "one is justified by faith", not that one acknowledges *that* they are justified by faith. **See above** for more.

Furthermore, those who believe this doctrine also believe that the elect were always favorable to God. And in a sense, this is true. In Christ, they were. But of themselves and before union with Christ, we were children of wrath and not of God (Eph. 2:3). Ephesians 2 does not speak of this relationship merely from our subjective viewpoint or the viewpoint of our experience. That is what we *were.* Further in the passage, Paul says that at the time that we were in the flesh, we were "separated from Christ," which certainly does not mean that we merely *felt* ourselves separated from Christ. We actually were and we demonstrated this by living in the flesh as the beginning of the chapter described.

This doctrine also confuses the ordo salutis (order of salvation). In Romans 8:29-30, we get very close to a clear ordo salutis: fore-loving, election, effectual calling, justification, glorification. Notice that justification does not take place in eternity, but in time, and specifically after we are powerfully called by the Holy Spirit to be in Christ. Notice the careful wording of the Confession: God did from all eternity **decree** to justify all the elect. It does not say that God justified all the elect from eternity because that is not what the Bible says. Rather, God planned and decided to justify all the elect. It is true that we were justified in Christ's resurrection only in the sense that our justification was purchased and secured. Yet, the totality of Scripture teaches that we are only justified when we believe. As we noted above, Galatians 2:16 even teaches that we believe "in order to be justified". John Dagg observes:

> Some have dated justification in eternity past, regarding it as grace given in Christ Jesus before the world began. Justification is not a secret purpose in the bosom of God, but a revelation from him, and therefore it cannot be eternal. It implies, not only the accounting of the sinner righteous, but the declaring of him righteous; other wise, it would not be the opposite of condemnation; and neither justification nor condemnation can be from eternity. God's purpose to

justify is eternal, and so is his purpose to glorify; but it is improper to say that believers are justified from eternity, as to say that they are glorified from eternity. It is clearly the doctrine of Scripture, that, on believing in Christ, men pass from a state of condemnation into a state of justification.[37]

The Puritan John Flavel criticized this doctrine in his own time, writing:

That the elect are not justified from eternity is clear, because although their justification is purposed in eternity, it is not purchased and applied until time. We are justified by Christ's blood and by faith. (Rom. 5.9,1) The elect sinner is not freed from condemnation nor justified till he is united to Christ, which union is by faith, and takes place during the elect's life-time. It is both irrational and unscriptural to imagine that men can be justified before they exist. God's purpose or intention to justify them is not the same as His actually justifying them. Besides, John 3.18 expressly declares that only "he that believeth in Him (Christ) is not condemned." Furthermore, in the great chain of salvation mentioned in Romans 8.30, the elect are first predestined and called before they are justified. Lastly, it is highly derogatory to Christ to teach eternal justification, for men had to be lost before He could save them. Justification is the fruit of His meritorious death and satisfaction given to justice. Justification is not, therefore, from eternity.[38]

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§5 God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified

5. God doth **continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified,** **1** and although they can **never fall from the state of justification,** **2** yet they may, by their sins, fall under **God's fatherly displeasure;** and in that condition they have not usually the light of his countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, **confess their sins,** beg pardon, and **renew their faith and repentance.** **3**
    1. Matt. 6:12; 1 John 1:7-2:2; John 13:3-11
    2. Luke 22:32; John 10:28; Heb. 10:14
    3. Ps. 32:5; 51:7-12; Matt. 26:75; Luke 1:20

Not only at the moment of justification, but **God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified** (1 John 1:8-9) even if **they can never fall from the state of justification** (e.g., John 6:37-40; 10:28-29). It is not possible for a person who once was justified to later be *un*justified. But through our sin, we damage our relationship with God and with others. Because of that, we may **fall under God's fatherly displeasure** and discipline (Heb. 12:3-17). We will remain in that condition until we grab a hold on the promise of 1 John 1:8-9, **humble** ourselves**, confess** our **sins, beg pardon** from the One Who has promised to forgive us, knowing that we will receive His forgiveness. Thereby we **renew** our **faith and repentance** and are again on the narrow path.

Continued Confession of Sin and Forgiveness

We still sin. Once we are justified it does not mean that sin is completely eradicated. The penalty of sin is indeed completely eradicated, but the sinful world around us is not eradicated neither is the flesh completely defeated yet. Our desires are not completely God-centered as they should be. We fall short. See chapter 9 on **man's will in the State of Grace**. We should daily pray for the forgiveness of the sins that we know about and others which we may not consciously know about. Our Lord taught us to pray "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). We seek God's forgiveness as we also seek forgiveness from those whom we have wronged. The Lord promises us that we will receive forgiveness if we come to Him through Christ and confess our sins. Oh, what comfort! What joy! What grace to a wretch like me!

1 John 1:8-9 If we say we have **no sin, we deceive ourselves**, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we **confess our sins**, he is faithful and just to **forgive** us our sins and to **cleanse us from all unrighteousness**.

If we think that we are able to live a sinless life and never sin again, we lie to ourselves and we are actually not in the Lord as we contradict His Word. But, when we sin we should confess our sins and not misuse grace (cf. Rom. 6:1-2). It is not like that God does not know that we sinned, but He desires that we come to Him, in all honesty, confessing our sins before His face and receiving forgiveness. It is not knowledge which God seeks, but confession and acknowledgment that we have rebelled against Him. John says that God is faithful and just in cleansing us from all sin and unrighteousness. He is faithful to

His promise that we will be cleansed from sin and we will be glorified. But He is also just because the Substitute was punished in our place for all our sins, past, present and future. It is on this basis that God is just. Not because He ignores our sins, but because a propitiation—a satisfaction for those sins was provided in Jesus Christ for us (1 John 2:1-2). Moreover, we know that we will be forgiven because it is Jesus Christ Who intercedes for us and stands between us and His Father (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 4:15-16; 7:25). We don't stand before God on the basis of our righteousness, rather we are clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ. Peter Pett sheds some light on this passage:

> The way to deal with sin is not by denying it or hiding from it, but by being open to the God Who is light. Then we can bring to Him those sins that grieve Him, that are revealed by His light, openly admitting them and acknowledging them to Him, and then know that He is the faithful God, the One Who is true to His promises and to His covenant with us, and that He will justly forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The last fact is most important, 'all unrighteousness'. He does not just forgive the sins of which we are aware, but also those of which we are unaware. When we are open with Him He cleanses us from *all* unrighteousness.
>
> …
>
> Note first here the stress on the faithfulness of God. If we are His He constantly watches over us and He is faithful to us, for He has brought us within His covenant (see 1Co 1:8-9) and we are His. And because of that faithfulness forgiveness is assured. There can be no room for doubt. For He Who made the provision for our sin through the shedding of His blood, will also faithfully apply it when we call on Him, to remove every blot and every stain (1Jn 2:2). Then we will not only be forgiven, but will be made fully clean. It is a day by day cleansing, and it is complete.
>
> And note secondly that God does it justly. There is here no casual overlooking of sin. He Who is light cannot be casual about sin. He is rather able to cleanse us from sin because it has been borne by another. God does not go against His own righteousness in forgiving, for He has Himself ensured that the guilt of that sin has been placed on the One Whom He sent as Saviour of the world (1Jn 4:14). 'He has made Him sin for us, He Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God through Him' (2Co 5:21). 'Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree' (1Pe 2:24). For when Christ died, we who are His died in Him, and through Him therefore we have paid the price of sin and have been given resurrection life (Gal 2:20).[39]

Never Fall

The elect can never fall away from the state of grace. They may have times when they neglect God and the things of God, but they can never fall as God is the One Who keeps them (e.g., 1 John 3:9). Remember the story of Peter? Peter did for a little while fall and denied his Lord, but the Lord Jesus promised Him beforehand: "I have prayed for you that **your faith may not fail**. And **when you have turned again**, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32). The Lord both foretold Peter's fall and his restoration. So likewise, it may be with some children of God when they have seasons in their life which God for reasons unknown to us has in His wisdom ordained for some of His children to walk through. That they can never fall is seen in many texts, particularly in the Gospel of John—

> John 10:28-29 I give them eternal life, and **they will never perish**, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and **no one is able to snatch them** out of the Father's hand.

We already *have* eternal life (John 3:16, 36) and we cannot lose it. We have been born by the Spirit, we cannot be unborn. God will work in us His pleasure (Phil. 2:11-12), which is for the sheep of Christ not to perish (John 6:39). It is the Lord Jesus and the Father Who hold us in Their hands. It is impossible for His sheep to be lost. This is the Father's will for the Son (John 6:39) and there is no way for the Son, Who always does what the Father pleases, to fail in this task (John 8:29). See also **chapter 17 on The Perseverance of the Saints** where we will Lord willing make a case for that doctrine and also a **Scripture List supporting the Perseverance of the Saints**.

Renew Their Faith and Repentance

See chapter 15 **paragraph 2**.

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§6 The justification of believers under the Old Testament was, in all these respects

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. [1]

1. Gal. 3:9; Rom. 4:22-24

The justification of believers under the Old Testament was likewise by grace alone because they were saved by faith alone based on the work of Christ (Gal. 3:9; Rom. 4:1-10; 22-24; **chapter 8:6**) and by the Covenant of Grace (**chapter 7:3**). Therefore, it is **one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament**. They were not justified by works and we, under the New Testament, by grace through faith. No. Salvation and justification have always been by grace through faith from the Fall until the end of the world.

All the saints of the Old Testament were justified by grace through faith by virtue of the Covenant of Grace as it was in promise-form. This, we have argued in **chapter 7** under the Mosaic, but especially in chapter 8 about the **Retroactive Blood of Christ**. See also above in paragraph 3 about Abraham's justification in **Paul** and in **James**.

Oh, what amazing grace to know that our justification is not depended upon us. What comfort and what thankfulness to God! Thank You, Lord God-King, for everything that You have done for such a miserable wretch like me. All glory to the Blessed Trinity!

And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

(Romans 4:5-6)

Footnotes

1. ^ *Many Scriptural references have been supplied by Samuel Waldron's Modern Exposition of 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith which was apparently supplied by the Westminster Confession of Faith 1646.*
2. ^ *Wayne Grudem. Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994). Chapter 36, p. 723.*
3. ^ *Louis Berkhof. Systematic Theology. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Banner of Truth Trust. 1963). p. 513.*
4. a, b *A. H. Strong. Systematic Theology: A Compendium Designed For The Use Of Theological Students. (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1970. Originally, 1907). p. 849.*
5. ^ *Catechism of the Catholic Church.*
6. ^ *Taken from Matt Slick at CARM, The Roman Catholic view on justification.*
7. a, b, c, d *Charles J. Ellicott. Commentary For English Readers. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*

8. a, b, c, d, e, f *John Calvin. Commentaries. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
9. a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h *Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
10. a, b, c, d *Joseph Henry Thayer's Greek Definitions. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. See reference for the Strong's number.*
11. ^ *William D. Mounce. Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words. (Zondervan, 2006). p. 146.*
12. a, b *Robert L. Dabney. Systematic Theology. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985). p. 620.*
13. ^ *Ibid., p. 374.*
14. ^ *Berkhof, Systematic Theology. pp. 510-511.*
15. ^ *Strong, Systematic Theology. p. 853.*
16. a, b, c, d, e, f *Matthew Poole. English Annotations on the Holy Bible. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
17. a, b, c, d, e *Philip Schaff. A Popular Commentary on the New Testament. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
18. ^ *Strong, Systematic Theology. p. 855.*
19. a, b, c, d, e *John Gill. Exposition of the Entire Bible. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
20. a, b, c, d *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges. Edited by J. J. S. Perowne. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
21. ^ *International Critical Commentary on the New Testament (ICCNT). Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
22. ^ *Berkhof, Systematic Theology. pp. 515-516.*
23. ^ *Dabney, Systematic Theology. p. 627.*
24. ^ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version: The ESV Study Bible. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles. 2008). p. 2265.*
25. ^ *William Robertson Nicoll. The Expositor's Greek Testament. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
26. a, b *Mickelson's Enhanced Strong's Greek and Hebrew Dictionaries. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. See reference for the Strong's number.*
27. ^ *Johann Albrecht Bengel. Gnomon of the NT. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
28. a, b, c, d, e, f, g *Jamieson, Fausset, Brown. Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible (Abridged). Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
29. ^ *Joseph Benson. Commentary on the Old and New Testaments. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
30. ^ *Explaining Regeneration Preceding Faith.*
31. ^ *Grudem, Systematic Theology. Chapter 34, p. 704, n. 10.*
32. ^ *Counting Faith as Righteousness. Ligonier Ministries.*
33. ^ *Dabney, Systematic Theology. p. 638.*
34. ^ *John Piper. Faith and the Imputation of Righteousness. Sermon from 1999.*
35. ^ *J. L. Dagg. A Manual of Theology. (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Pub. 2009, originally 1857). pp. 269-270. Can also be found online.*
36. ^ *50 Things the Holy Spirit Does.*
37. ^ *Dagg, Manual. p. 274.*
38. ^ *John Flavel. Eternal Justification? Banner Of Truth, 2004.*
39. ^ *Peter Pett. Commentary on the Bible and Library Collection. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*