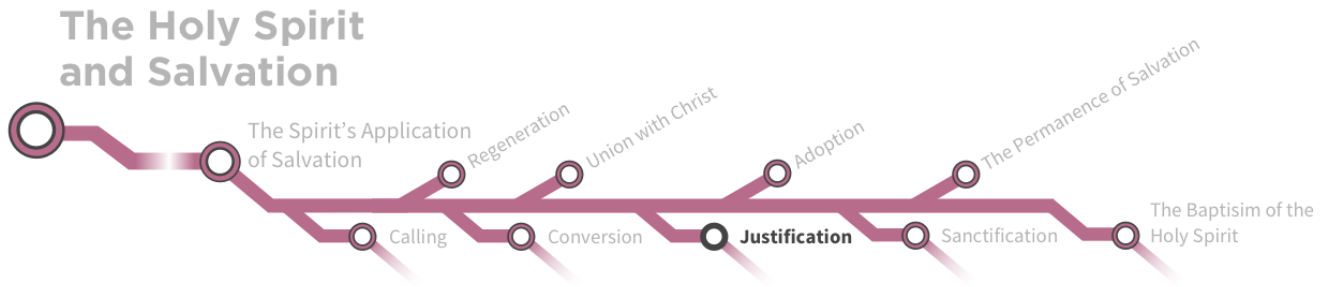


Justification



Justification is a Christian's judicial acceptance by God as not guilty because his sins are not counted against him.

Paul proclaims that “all who believe” are justified by faith without works (Rom 3:24–25, 28). In other words, believers are reckoned as righteous by God not on the basis of their good works but because of what Christ has achieved for them, received by faith. The Reformers coined the doctrine of “justification by faith alone.” This does not mean that faith exists on its own. Saving faith is expressed in baptism, is joined with repentance and works through love. Christians are not justified by such things, but nor are they justified without them. It is only faith that saves, not because faith is greater than love or any other virtue, but because faith unites believers with Christ, in whom and because of whom they are accepted. So faith alone justifies, but the faith that justifies is never alone, it never exists without love and good works.

James, however, says that we are justified not by faith alone but by works. How is that to be reconciled with Paul? As is often noted, James uses the words “justification” and “faith” differently from Paul. He states that Abraham was “counted as righteous” by faith (2:23), which is what Paul means by “justification by faith” (Rom 4:2–5). Abraham was then subsequently “justified by works” (2:24). This has given birth to the contrast between an initial “justification of the ungodly” (Rom 4:5) and a subsequent “justification of the godly.” There are different views as to how this second justification is to be understood. Roman Catholics, who have normally understood justification to refer to the process of our being made like Christ, see James as referring to that process. I.e., they see James as referring to what Protestants call sanctification.

Luther was famously negative about James, but Protestants have felt the need to reconcile James with their Pauline doctrine of justification. One way is to see James as referring to the way in which

we are demonstrated to be righteous in the sight of others, the way in which we are seen to have a true living faith, not the dead faith of mere head knowledge to which James refers.

Passages

KEY VERSES

- [Ro 3:21–4:25](#)
- [Ga 2:15–3:29](#)
- [Ro 10:1–13](#)
- [Jas 2:14–26](#)
- [Lk 18:9–14](#)

Recommended Resources

- 🔒 [Justification: Five Views](#) (Beilby & Eddy, eds.).
- 📖 [Justification by Faith](#) (McGrath).
- 🔒 [Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification](#) (Schreiner).
- 📖 [The New Perspective on Paul](#) (Thompson).

🔍 [Find more resources on Justification](#)

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- [Jesus' Death](#)
- [Saving Faith](#)
- [God's Law](#)
- [God's Righteousness](#)
- [Union with Christ](#)
- [Sanctification](#)

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- [Justification](#)

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