

Instruction In The Westminster Standards

The Historic Standards of Presbyterian Denominations.

STUDIES IN THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

Q. 33. What is justification?

A. Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ, imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

Scripture References:

Eph. 1:7. II Cor. 5:19, 21; Rom. 4:5
Rom. 3:22, 24, 25. Rom. 5:17-19. Rom. 5:1.
Act. 10:43. Gal. 2:16.

Questions:

1. What does the word "justify" mean in the New Testament?

The word means "to deem to be right" in the New Testament. It signifies two things: (1) to show to be right or righteous; (2) to declare to be righteous.

2. Who is the author of our justification?

God is the author of our justification. In this Question we have the first of a series in which the words "an act of God's free grace" is used. We are justified freely through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. The grace of God is the deepest ground and final cause of our justification.

3. What are the two parts to justification?

The two parts are: (1) the pardoning of our sins; (2) the accepting us as righteous in his sight.

4. What two great truths are present in these two parts?

The first truth is that the pardoning of our sins is a continued act. (See Calvin on John 1:29). All our sins are forgiven. The second truth is that we are not only pardoned but our Lord does not abhor us but accepts us as righteous.

5. How is it possible that he accepts us as righteous?

It is possible for him to accept us as righteous because his righteousness is made ours by imputation. (Rom. 4:6).

6. What is imputation and how does it apply to us?

Imputation is God's act of reckoning righteousness or guilt to a person's credit or debit. It is as if we had obeyed the law and had satisfied justice.

7. How are we justified?

We are justified purely by faith without any kind of work being involved.

JUSTIFICATION - FAITH AND WORKS

In the Epistles of Paul, the Apostle tells us time and time again that we are justified freely by the grace of God. A. A. Hodge tells us, "It (Justification) is 'in the name of Christ,' I Cor. 6:11; 'by his blood,' Rom. 5:9; 'freely,' 'by his grace,' 'by faith.' Rom. 3:24, 28." And yet so many times the argument is presented, "James stated: 'Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.' (James 2:24) How can both Paul and James be right?"

It is true that both Paul and James are right. The apostle Paul affirms and proves by many arguments that justification is by faith, faith in the object of Christ and his righteousness. Paul affirms and proves that it is by faith and without works. Paul goes on to prove that instead of our being justified by good works, the works are only possible to us in that new relationship to God into which we are introduced by justification.

James does not treat the matter of justification by faith in the chapter cited above. He is treating the very important matter of what relationship the good works of the believer have to be a genuine faith. James is simply saying that a genuine faith, which A. A. Hodge calls "the instrumental cause of justification", will produce a living faith, a faith with works. An old divine used to say, "Faith justifies our persons, but works justify our faith, and declares us to be justified before men, who cannot see nor know our faith but by our works."

Combining Paul and James the believer has two important truths: (1) Justification by faith includes two wonderful elements, both freely bestowed upon the believer by God. The first is remission of sins and the second, restoration to divine favor. (2) Because we are justified by faith the justification will always be accompanied with sanctification, without which our justification cannot be true.

Two verses that combine the above two truths, and two verses that would help the believer greatly, are Philippians 3:8, 9. Commit them to memory and pray that they will be living and vital in the life, all to His glory!

Published By: **THE SHIELD and SWORD, INC.**

Dedicated to instruction in the Westminster Standards for use as a bulletin insert or other methods of distribution in Presbyterian churches.

For information write to: **The Shield and Sword, Inc., French Camp, Mississippi.** A non-profit religious organization.

Vol 3

No. 33

September, 1963

Price

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To Churches — \$2.00 per 100
Individuals — \$1.35 per year

Back Copies

To Churches — \$2.25 per 100
Individuals — 15c each

