The Doctrine of Justification

Three Propositions
1. God is righteous.
2. Humanity is sinful.
3. God justifies humanity.

1. The driving test demands high standards.
2. None of us can meet those standards.
3. The examiner declares that we have passed the test.

The Order of Salvation: What we have studied so far
- **The gospel call**: the preached message invites us to trust in Christ for forgiveness of sins.
- **Regeneration**: God imparts new spiritual life into us and so makes it possible for us to respond to that invitation.
- **Conversion**: we turn from our sins (repentance) and turn to Christ (faith).
- **What happens next?** Now, God has to respond and declare our sins to be forgiven. This must be a legal declaration concerning our relationship to God’s laws, stating that we are completely forgiven and no longer liable to punishment.

God declares sinners to be right in his sight when they believe in Jesus (Romans 3:25 NLT). 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 (Rom 3:26 ESV).

For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law (Romans 3:28 ESV)
So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law (Romans 3:28 NLT).

Justification is a legal declaration by God; it is God acting as a judge, declaring that a person is righteous in his sight. The opposite of justification is condemnation. If God has declared you righteous in his sight, you do not have to pay the penalty for your past, present or future sins. ‘There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus’ (Romans 8:1).

Three images: The Driving Test, the Courtroom and the Financial World
Justification is an instantaneous legal act of God, in which he declares, on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, that all the requirements of the law are satisfied with respect to the sinner. There are two parts to the doctrine of justification:

1) God forgives us and declares us to be righteous in his sight because of what Jesus has done for us—God declares that we have no penalty to pay for sin, including past, present, and future sins. We are fully forgiven.
2) God then takes Jesus’ record of perfect obedience to him and transfers it to our empty slate. Now when God looks at our slate, it is not only wiped clean of sin, but it also has written on it a complete record of the Christ’s righteousness—the perfect obedience of Jesus to God the Father. This is what theologians call God imputing Christ’s righteousness to us.

- I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels (Isaiah 61:10).
- And Abraham believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6).
- For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:3).

Imputation in the Bible
1) When Adam sinned, his guilt was imputed to us. God the Father viewed it as belonging to us.
2) When Christ suffered and died for our sins, our sin was imputed to Christ. God thought of it as belonging to him, and he paid the penalty for it.
3) Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us, and therefore God thinks of it as belonging to us. It is not our own righteousness but Christ’s righteousness that is freely given to us.
- 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 (Romans 5:19).
Results of Justification

1) We now have peace with God. ‘Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Romans 5:1).

2) We now have the assurance of salvation. ‘Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God’ (Romans 5:9).

3) We now have the hope of eternal life. ‘Because of his grace he declared us righteous (justified us) and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life’ (Tit 3:7 NLT).

Justification is not merely an abstract theological concept. It is the sense of approval and belonging that every person desires. Justification is more than having our sins forgiven. Justification means that in God’s eyes, we are given Jesus’ perfect record. We are treated as if we had lived the perfect life that Jesus lived. We are given the love that Jesus deserved. We have the same access to the Father that Jesus did. The good news is that all of this comes not from us doing anything, but simply by faith.’ —Timothy Keller

Justification is one of the central themes of Scripture, especially the New Testament, where various forms of the word “justify” (dikaioo) appear more than two hundred times. The centrality of justification has been recognized by many theologians in the history of the Christian church. John Calvin called it “the main hinge on which salvation turns.” The English Reformer Thomas Cranmer described it as “the strong rock and foundation of Christian religion.” Perhaps most famously of all, Martin Luther called justification “the chief article of Christian doctrine,” so that “when justification has fallen, everything has fallen.” Whether we think of justification as the hinge, the foundation, or the standing-and-falling article of salvation, there is no hope of salvation without it. This is the doctrine, said Luther on another occasion, that “begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God; and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour.” —Philip Graham Ryken

Justification is the opposite of condemnation. To justify is to pronounce a verdict of innocence. In justification a person is not made righteous, but declared righteous. — Ryken

Justification means something more than acquittal. To acquit is to declare a person “not guilty.” But in justification God does not simply clear a sinner of all charges; he declares a sinner to be positively righteous. Justification is God’s legal declaration that, on the basis of the perfect life and the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, received by faith, a sinner is as righteous as his own beloved Son. —Ryken

XI. OF THE JUSTIFICATION OF MAN (39 Articles: Book of Common Prayer)

We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings: Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification.

XIII. OF WORKS BEFORE JUSTIFICATION

Works done before the grace of Christ, and the Inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ, neither do they make men meet to receive grace, or (as the School-authors say) deserve grace of congruity: yea rather, for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin.