

Our Justification LORD'S DAY 23

59. Q. But what does it help you now that you believe all this?
- A. In Christ I am righteous before God and heir to life everlasting.¹

1. **Habakkuk 2:4** Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.

John 3:36 He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

Romans 1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is

revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Romans 5:1,2 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

60. Q. How are you righteous before God?
- A. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ.¹
Although my conscience accuses me
That I have grievously sinned
Against all God's commandments,
Have never kept any of them,²
And am still inclined to all evil,³
yet God, without any merit of my own,⁴
out of mere grace,⁵
imputes to me
the perfect satisfaction,
righteousness, and holiness of Christ.⁶
He grants these to me
as if I had never had nor committed
any sin,
and as if I myself had accomplished
all the obedience
which Christ has rendered for me,⁷
if only I accept this gift
with a believing heart.⁸

1. **Romans 3:21-28** But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,²⁵ whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,²⁶ to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.²⁷ Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith.²⁸ Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

Galatians 2:16 ...knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by

the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

Ephesians 2:8,9 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Philippians 3:8-11 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,¹¹ if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

2. **Romans 3:9,10** What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.

- ¹⁰ As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one;
- Romans 7:23** But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.
 - Deuteronomy 9:6** Therefore understand that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people.

Ezekiel 36:22 Therefore say to the house of Israel, "Thus says the Lord GOD: "I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went.

Titus 3:4,5 But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, ⁵ not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit...

- Romans 3:24** ...being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God...
- Romans 4:3-5** For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."⁴ Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. ⁵ But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness...

- 2 Corinthians 5:17-19** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. ¹⁸ Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

1 John 2:1,2 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

- Romans 4:24,25** ...but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

- John 3:18** "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Acts 16:30,31 And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

Romans 3:22 ...even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference...

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| <p>61. Q. Why do you say that you are righteous only by faith?</p> |
| <p>A. Not that I am acceptable to God on account of the worthiness of my faith, for only the satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ is my righteousness before God.¹ I can receive this righteousness and make it my own by faith only.²</p> |

- 1 Corinthians 1:30,31** But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God; and righteousness and sanctification and redemption; ³¹ that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."

1 Corinthians 2:2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

- Romans 10:10** For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

1 John 5:10-12 He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. ¹¹ And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ¹² He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Have you ever studied a subject which seems very impractical, a subject that you think you'll never need in your life? I recall having such thoughts in my physics class where we worked with vectors, and in my mathematics class where we worked with logarithms.

With Lord's Day 23 we have come to the end of the Apostles' Creed. This Creed is a statement of the faith which proceeds out of the mouth of the church, and which echoes the doctrine contained in the Word of God. And this is taught to the covenant youth. Now our beloved Catechism does not want you to ever think that what it teaches is impractical or irrelevant. Thus the Catechism repeatedly asks the questions which you, the student, might be thinking. It asks the question, "*What does it benefit you...*" or as the question is asked in this Lord's Day, "*What does it help you...?*"

Having completed its explanation of the Apostles' Creed, the Catechism now asks that question: "What does it help you that you believe all this?" The answer is short and simple. The knowledge of our God and of His redemptive work in Jesus Christ is essential for our salvation. For by faith we are justified. And those who are justified are made heirs of eternal life. That makes faith very important!

We should define *justification*. To be *just* means to be law-abiding, free from guilt of any crime. We could define justification simply as *the legal declaration of God whereby we are declared free from all guilt and pronounced law-abiding citizens of God's kingdom*. He who is justified is declared "*not guilty, and righteous (perfectly obedient to the law of God)*."

This Lord's Day describes this process of making one righteous before God. Before we speak about this work of Christ in justifying us, we should first consider the three-fold effect of sin that corresponds to Christ's three-fold work of justification.

A. The Three-Fold Effect of Sin

1. **Sins of commission** - We have done what God has forbidden, namely, transgressed His laws. Thus the Catechism reads: "*My conscience accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all God's commandments.*"
2. **Sins of omission** - We have not done what God demands, namely, render perfect obedience to His laws. Thus the Catechism reads: "*My conscience accuses me that I have never kept any of God's commandments.*"
3. **An unholy nature** - As a result of our disobedience, we have lost the excellent qualities and virtues with which we were created. We have become darkened in our understanding, corrupt in our desires and rebellious in our will. Thus the Catechism reads: "*My conscience accuses me that I am still inclined to all evil.*"

In order to receive eternal life, we must be justified. Before we can be justified, God demands three things.

B. The Three-Fold Demand of God

1. God is a faithful Judge who demands **satisfaction** for sin committed against His most High majesty. This satisfaction requires extreme punishment of body and soul.
2. God also requires that sins of omission be satisfied by rendering **righteousness** (perfect obedience) to God's law.
3. A worldly judge does not concern himself with what lives in the heart of a man. He is only concerned with outward actions. Yet God judges not only what we have done, but also what we are. He judges not only our deeds, but also our nature. To be received into God's favour, our nature must be **sanctified**, that is, made pure and holy again.

We could never render what is required, for the greatness of our sin deserves the greatest payment: eternal death.

Neither could we render satisfaction for sins of omission, nor the obedience that God demands must be perfect, whereas we of ourselves can do nothing good. Even when the Spirit of God regenerates us, our best works are defiled with sin. Furthermore, we do not have the ability to restore our nature to its former purity and holiness. Our justification lies outside of ourselves.

In His grace, God has given us Christ as our Mediator who justifies us. His work of justification corresponds to the effects of our fall into sin.

C. The Three-Fold Gift of Christ

1. Christ's satisfaction: Christ took upon Himself the guilt we incurred through the sins we committed. He has suffered the punishment of death for us, so that we might not have to die the eternal death. This payment of Christ perfectly satisfies the wrath of God. Thus the Catechism reads: *"Although my conscience accuses me that I have transgressed all God commandments...yet God ... imputes to me the perfect **satisfaction** of Christ."*

2. Christ's righteousness: Christ also rendered perfect obedience (righteousness) to God's law for us, in our place. Thus the Catechism reads: *"Although my conscience accuses me ... that I have never kept any of God's commandments ... yet God imputes to me ... the righteousness (the perfect obedience) of Christ."*

There is a danger that we only stress the forgiveness of sins through the satisfaction of Christ's death, and forget about the righteousness which we receive from Christ. When a minister asks his catechism students what Christ has done for them, they reply that He forgives their sins. Yet the Catechism correctly teaches that God also demands perfect obedience to His law. These sins of omission must be satisfied as well. There is

no salvation without that perfect obedience (righteousness).

3. Christ's holiness: We learned in Lord's Day 14 that Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit. By way of this miraculous birth, He escaped the inheritance of a corrupt nature. Christ was born pure and innocent, perfectly holy, and He remained that way throughout His life. This holiness of Christ is now imputed to us. Just as snow can cover much dirt and filth, so Christ's holiness covers our inward uncleanness. Thus the Catechism reads: *"Although my conscience accuses me... that I am still inclined to all sin ... yet God imputes to me the holiness of Christ."*

This work of Christ has a most marvellous effect upon our legal standing before the Lord. It changes the way that God looks at us.

D. The Three-Fold Way God Regards Us

God looks at us through Jesus Christ. We stand behind Christ, as it were. By faith, He becomes our Representative before God. By looking at us through Christ, God sees in us righteousness and holiness.

Because of Christ's work:

1. God sees no sins of commission in me. *God grants me the perfect satisfaction of Christ... as if I had never committed any sin.*
2. God sees no sins of omission in me. *God grants me the righteousness of Christ ... as if I myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me.*
3. God sees no unholiness in me. *Christ is our Mediator, and with His innocence and perfect holiness covers, in the sight of God my sin in which I was conceived and born (Q & A 36).*

These three gifts: Christ's satisfaction, righteousness and holiness are the three gifts by which we are justified.

| A. What God required of us | B. The Three-fold effect of sin | C. The Three-fold gift of Christ | D. The three-fold way God regards us |
|---|---|--|---|
| A1. Not to transgress any of God's commandments. | B1. We incurred guilt through sins of commission by transgressing all of God's commandments. | C1. He paid for all my transgressions. (Christ's satisfaction) | D1. As if I had never sinned against God. |
| A2. To fulfil all God's commandments. | B2. We incurred guilt through sins of omission by failing to keep God's commandments. | C2. He fulfilled all the obedience which God required of me. (Christ's righteousness) | D2. As if I had fulfilled all the requirements of God's law. |
| A3. To remain pure and holy. | B3. We became totally depraved, and possess an unholy, impure nature. | C3. He covers my corrupt nature with His holiness. (Christ's holiness) | D3. As if I possess a pure and holy nature. |

Study the table right above and commit it to memory. If it is still unclear, refer again to the section below where it is explained more fully.

Not all men are justified by Christ, but only those who believe. Therefore it is important that we believe what we have confessed in the Apostles' Creed. Faith is the hand of the soul that embraces Christ as Saviour, and takes from Him the gifts of grace that He offers us. Only those are justified who stretch out the hand of faith.

There is a need to stress the role of faith in our justification. For there is in Christianity a system of doctrine (called Arminianism) which views faith as a work of man which has taken the place of obedience to God's commandments as the way to salvation. The Arminians claim that righteousness is no longer necessary for salvation. They believe that the Father has lowered the demand. Instead of perfect obedience (righteousness) to His commandments, God only requires faith. Compare the two systems of doctrine in the table shown right.

The Arminian doctrine is contrary to the Scriptures. God has not reduced the demand. To enter into the kingdom of God, one must be righteous. One must possess perfect obedience to God's law. We confess that we cannot render that perfect obedience. But we also confess

that Christ has rendered that perfect obedience for us who believe in Him. To all those who go to Christ in faith, He offers the one hundred dollars which we need — the one hundred dollars which He as true man earned through His obedience to God's law while He walked on earth.

Faith does not replace the demand of perfect obedience to God's law. Faith is the hand of the soul that reaches out and accepts the perfect obedience of Christ. Faith itself does not make us righteous. Christ's satisfaction, righteousness and

| ARMINIAN | REFORMED |
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| In Paradise God demanded perfect obedience | In Paradise God demanded perfect obedience |
| After the fall man could no longer render the perfect obedience that God requires. But man can still do a little good , such as believe in God. | After the fall man could no longer render the perfect obedience that God requires. Man can do no good , not even believe in God. |
| Christ came to reduce God's demand and make the payment for salvation within our reach. This reduced payment for salvation is faith . | Christ came to fulfil God's demands for us and make the payment for salvation that we could not pay. The full payment for salvation is righteousness . |

holiness makes us righteous. Faith is not a substitute payment. Faith is an instrument with which we accept from Christ the perfect obedience that He rendered for us.

As far as this faith is concerned, Scripture teaches us that it is a gift that God gives to those whom He has chosen. It is not the product of man's own ability (cf. Eph 2:8).



Questions:

1. Why is it important that we accept in faith all that we have learned from the explanation of the Apostles' Creed?
2. What is justification? Of how many parts does justification consist? To what do these parts correspond?
3. Describe the three-fold demand of God.
4. Describe the three-fold effect of our fall into sin,
5. Describe the three-fold gift of Christ by which we are justified.
6. Describe the three-fold way in which God now regards us.
7. How does one come to share in the gifts of Christ?
8. The Arminians say that God has reduced the demand for eternal life. From what to what? How do the Arminians regard faith?
9. According to Scripture, does God still require perfect obedience (righteousness) from us in order to enter His eternal kingdom? From whom and how can we receive this righteousness? From where does faith come?