

- I. THE NATURE OF JUSTIFICATION (4th in Ordo Salutis [regeneration, calling, faith, justification])**
- A. Justification is a legal declaration of righteousness**
- 1. First, justification is legal**
 - a. When God justifies, God acts in His capacity as Judge (“It is God that justifieth” [Rom. 8:38]; “That He might be just and the justifier of him that believeth on Jesus” [Rom. 3:26]).
 - b. The word “legal” means that which pertains to law. Synonyms are judicial or forensic.
 - 2. Second, justification is a declaration**
 - a. By declaration we mean a statement, judgment, pronouncement, verdict.
 - b. The declaration by which we are justified is one single, decisive act of God; it does not admit of any appeal; it cannot be changed, increased, decreased or lost. A person is either justified or he is not, and if God justifies no man can condemn (“Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?” [Rom. 8:33-34a]).
 - 3. Third, justification is a declaration of righteousness.**
 - a. Righteous means straight, level or even. Righteous is the opp. of crooked, twisted or perverse.
 - b. Righteous means to be straight with respect to a standard. God is the perfect standard, and that perfect standard is revealed in God’s Law.
 - c. In justification God makes a positive declaration that we whom He justifies are in harmony with the perfect standard of God’s Law, that we are righteous before God.
 - d. This means, first, that no sin is laid to our charge (Rom. 8:33a). That aspect of justification is the forgiveness of sins. Second, all the positive requirements of God’s law are perfectly met. God looks upon us as those who “never had had, nor committed any sin; yea as if [we] had fully accomplished that obedience” (Heid. Cat. LD 23, Q&A 60). “...that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” [II Cor. 5:21].
 - 4. Proof that justification is a legal concept.**
 - a. The verb “justify” always has the legal, judicial, forensic meaning in Scripture. It is used in connection with judges, legal transactions, courts, judgments and the law.
 - b. The verb “justify” is the opposite of condemn: Deut. 25:1; Prov. 17:15; Job 40:8; Rom. 8:33-34. To condemn is to declare judicially and legally that a person is guilty and therefore not in harmony with the law and to punish accordingly. Therefore to justify is to declare judicially and legally that a person is innocent as to his status before the Law.
 - c. The verb “justify” is used in passages where it cannot mean anything else than to declare or pronounce to be righteous – Luke 7:29; I Tim. 3:16
- B. Since justification is God’s legal, judicial, forensic declaration that we are righteous, in harmony with the Law before Him it is *not* an ethical, moral work in us which makes us inwardly good.**
- 1. Roman Catholicism sees justification as a moral inner work in the sinner making him good**
 - a. We have seen that justification is a legal, judicial, federal act; Rome teaches that justification is an ethical, moral work. The difference is between God as a judge and God as a surgeon. One delivers a verdict; the other takes a scalpel to cut out the cancerous growth, etc.
 - b. Rome teaches that to justify is to make righteous (not simply to declare righteous); Rome teaches that justification is a moral, cleansing work which brings about a change in the person justified and an improvement in his character (not simply a declaration the person’s legal status).
 - c. Here are a few quotes from Rome’s *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (publ. 1994): “Justification is not only the remission of sins but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man” (par. 1989); “justification detaches man from sin which contradicts the love of God and purifies his heart from sin” (par. 1990); “with justification faith, hope and charity are poured into our hearts” (par. 1991); “justification conforms us to the righteousness of God who makes us inwardly just by the power of his mercy” (par. 1992).
 - 2. The key word in justification for Roman Catholicism is “infuse.”**

- a. To infuse is to pour, fill, steep, soak or impart. e.g. Infuse tea bags in hot water to produce tea.
- b. In justification, says Rome, God infuses the soul with grace, or God pours grace into the soul. By “grace” Rome means a spiritual virtue and power which makes the soul pleasing to God and worthy of God’s favour. Infusion of grace therefore leads to a moral improvement.
- c. Infusion of grace (and therefore justification itself) is a process. No sinner can merit (deserve or earn) that initial grace which is usually received in baptism; but a sinner *can merit* additional grace, and therefore a sinner can merit an increase in justification before God. By the process of becoming holier by performing good works, partaking of the sacraments, a sinner is progressively justified. On the other hand, sin can “kill” grace in the soul, and by sin a person can forfeit and lose the grace of justification. Final justification in the Roman system depends on the state of one’s soul at the point of death. Unjustified souls are damned; and justified souls are further purified in purgatory after death. “No one can merit the initial grace of forgiveness and justification at the beginning of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity we can then merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity and for the attainment of eternal life” (par. 2010)
- d. So, justification in Rome is God’s work of making a soul holy, and then God declares on Judgment Day that those whom He has made holy by infusing virtue (grace) into them, which they have merited, are holy (after a process of purification in purgatory). Romish justification can be increased, decreased or lost at any time; and nobody can know whether he is righteous enough to merit heaven. *We will see that the key word in Reformed justification is “impute.”*

II. THE BASIS OF JUSTIFICATION

A. Rome teaches God justifies those *whom He has made holy*; the Bible teaches that God justifies the **ungodly** (Rom. 4:5, “To him that worketh not but believeth on Him that *justifieth the ungodly.*”

1. **This means that God makes a legal declaration that the ungodly (but believing) sinner is.**
 - a. Innocent of all sin so that no one (not the devil, the world, etc) can lay anything to his charge.
 - b. As far as his legal standing before God is concerned in perfect harmony with the Law of God.
 - c. So far from guilty and worthy of condemnation and punishment that he is worthy of eternal life.
2. **And remember God says this of one who has broken all of God’s commandments, kept none of them, and is still inclined to all wickedness according to the sinful flesh.**
 - a. Some would accuse the Reformed Faith of teaching that God is guilty of a terrible injustice. *He justifies the wicked; He clears the guilty* (Prov. 17:15). Is that not a “legal fiction”?
 - b. That would be, they say, for God to cover up a dirty man with a white cloak and pretend that he is clean. Does God “pretend” that the justified believing sinner is righteous when he is not?

B. Justification is not a “legal fiction” b/c God has a righteous ground (or basis) for His declaration.

1. **God declares us legally righteous before Him because we possess God’s own righteousness.**
 - a. That righteousness which we possess is not a partial, imperfect righteousness but a perfect righteousness which answers all of the claims of the Law of God so that, first, all sins against the Law are paid for, and, second, all positive requirements of the Law are met.
 - b. That righteousness is not performed by us or worked by us but it is the righteousness of another. That’s why Luther called it an “alien righteousness.”
 - c. That righteousness consists of the perfect work of Jesus Christ for us in living for us and dying for us. The Bible calls everything Christ did for us His “obedience.” Rom. 5:19, “By one man’s disobedience many were made (constituted, placed in the category of) sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made (constituted, placed in the category of) righteous.”
2. **That righteousness which is Christ’s, and therefore God’s, is His active & passive obedience.**
 - a. Christ’s active obedience consists in His perfect work of keeping the Law and thus answering the positive demands of the Law for us.
 - b. Christ’s passive obedience consists in His work of bearing the punishment we deserved.
 - c. These two aspects of Christ’s obedience become ours in justification (Rom. 3:22; Phil. 3:9).
 - d. Next week: how do we come into possession of this perfect righteousness? Imputation!