

Of Justification (Part 3)

Ps 89:20-37; WCF 11.3-11.6

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 22 September 2019, 16:30
(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)¹

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,
Our sermon covers the Bible truths re our justification – Bible truths explained by the WCF article 11.3, 11.4, 11.5 and 11.6.
Our sermon has four points.
Here is the first one

Justification: Full & Freely to His Glory

The Bible teaches (and we see it, too) that every human being is a sinner – a sinner who not only commits *deeds* of sin (called actual sin), but who is sinful by his/her *very nature* (original sin). Of course, we also know that both the Hebrew and Greek words for sin mean “to miss the mark,” i.e. to miss the mark when it comes to pleasing our Creator & God!

And, this is very bad news, for the Bible tells us that God is perfectly sinless and holy!

And don't we even get a glimpse of God's perfection when we look at the “fingerprints” of God which we see in all of creation – even creation after the Fall!?

So, if we are sinners (and we are!), and God is perfectly sinless and holy – but also just, then every human being is in trouble; yes, a debtor to God; and in such a way that we are bankrupt and do not have the resources to pay our debt!

It's like someone who owes the bank an enormous amount of dollars, but this person's income is not anywhere near enough to even pay the bank the interest on that debt, let alone the capital!

Yet, what compassion – and what grace (!) – if a wealthy businessman comes and graciously pays all of that debtor's debt to the bank!

And this is exactly what Jesus Christ (the Son of God) did, for all of God's people – only, He did not pay in financial currency, but with His own life, and willingly so!

Now, of course, there's a difference between a gracious benefactor's money paid on behalf of a debtor into his bank account, and the huge price Christ paid to appease God's wrath for our sins!

Here is the difference...

You see, it will hardly ever happen that a bank manager will refuse to accept the money paid by a kind person on behalf of another. But look, by way of His justice, the Father in heaven is not bound to accept the payment Christ has made for us! He could have said: “No, I want these sinners themselves to take the responsibility of paying for their sins!”

Yet, the Father not only accepted this payment; no, by His grace, God Triune designed this payment!!

So, that's why the Bible teaches...

(in Is 53:5-6), ***But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.***²

¹ In writing this sermon, I am greatly indebted to my two main sources whose guidance I appreciate: 1) Van Dixhoorn, Chad. 2014. *Confessing the Faith: a reader's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Carlisle, PA : The Banner of Truth Trust. 484p.

2) Sproul, R.C. 2006. *The truth we confess*. (In: Sproul, R.C. ed. *Truths we confess: a layman's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith – in three volumes*. Vol. 2: *Salvation and the Christian Life* (Chapters 9-22 of the Confession) Phillipsburg, NJ : P&R Publishing. 279p.).

Many words & phrases I have written, I have gladly borrowed with great thankfulness from this source.

² Also cf. Rm 5:8, ***but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***

And also Heb 10:14, ***For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.***

My brother & sister, on one single day – that very first Good Friday – our Lord Jesus gave power to all Old-Testament sacrifices, and fulfilled them! They would never ever be needed again!

Take for example the sacrifices made year after year on the Day of Atonement.

You see, on the Day of atonement, there was a *vertical* dimension and a *horizontal* dimension to the forgiveness of God's people's sins.

The vertical dimension took place when the blood of a bull and a goat was sprinkled on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant, i.e. on the throne of God! (That was the people's atonement with God).

But there was also the horizontal dimension, in which the scapegoat was involved. Yes, a live goat was brought to the priest. The priest then had to lay his hand on the head of the goat to transfer/impute the guilt of the people onto the goat. Then this sin-laden goat was sent away into the wilderness never to return again!³

Well, similarly, Jesus was not just slaughtered like that bull and the first goat – yes, not only was Jesus' blood spilled to satisfy the demands of God's justice & wrath (Jesus did not just take God's punishment for us); no, He also became the scapegoat who bore our sins and took them away!

Yes, like the scapegoat, He took our sins outside the camp/city where He became God's curse for us!

My brother & sister, here's a question:

Does one have to understand the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in all its complexities in order to be saved?

No, you don't!

However, here is something very important... If you do understand this doctrine/teaching *and then reject it* (as we heard in this morning's sermon),⁴ *then you will not be saved!!*

So, how much do you need to understand? Well, you do need, at least, a simple, basic understanding of this doctrine in order to be saved. You see, the great theologian and preacher, RC Sproul, remembered his conversion in the following way, "*I think of my own conversion experience as a young man. Nobody had ever explained the doctrine of justification to me, so I did not understand it. I knew I was a sinner, and that I could not live a perfect life. I knew I was in trouble and in debt, and that I could not pay. I threw myself on the mercy of the court and cried out to God, 'God, forgive me!' I had no concept of the atonement in a theological sense. The spiritual experience of that most decisive moment of my entire life was a profound existential experience. For the first time in my life, I knew that I was clean, that my sins had been forgiven. They had been taken away. That is the heart of justification, because God remits (sends away) the sin of every person who trusts in Christ...*"⁵

My brother & sister, what's the point that the WCF 11.3 makes about justification? Well, *that justification by faith alone is justification by Christ alone – not in a way in which Christ assists me, nor working in me to save myself, but Christ working for me by His active & perfect obedience. He actively satisfied every demand of the Law of God, and He passively received the punishment for my sins on the cross!*⁶

And so, God did two things when He crushed His beloved Son for you & me:

- 1) God upheld His justice by punishing our sins on His Son. Thus, nobody can say that God is not just; that He simply waives sinners' debts!
- 2) God is seen as the justifier of sinners like you & me!

³ Cf. Lev 16:1-22

⁴ The sermon on Luke 20:9-19

⁵ Cf. Sproul (ibid:61-62)

⁶ My adaptation of the words of Sproul (ibid:62)

And, indeed, these two things about God – that He is just, and that He is the justifier of sinners – are mentioned by the Apostle Paul in Rm 3:26, “...**he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.**”⁷ And so, to His glory, God upheld both His justice and His grace!

Well, so far point 1.
Here is the very short point 2...

Justification Applied in Time

My brother & sister, in many different passages the Bible tells us that it was *from all eternity* that God decreed that He would justify/save His elect people!

One such passage is of course Rm 8:29-30 in which the Apostle Paul said that those whom God *foreknew* He predestined, and those whom He *predestined* He called, and those whom He called He *justified*...⁸

And so, it's true – our justification was *determined* before the world began, and before time!

But look, our justification had to be *completed* in history!

Why do we say that?

Well, because Jesus had to *physically* come into our world and, at the right time (a time chosen by God), make the payment for our sins!

That's why Gal 4:4 says, “**But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, ⁵ to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.**”⁹

And so, there is a real sense in which you & I can say that we have been justified two thousand years ago, when our Lord Jesus died on the cross for our sins!¹⁰

But sadly, over the centuries, some Christians have so focused on God's eternal decree – and others have so focused on their justification by Christ on the cross, that they have lost sight of the fact that there comes a point in time when justification must be applied to the life of everyone of God's loved ones!

⁷ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Ro 3:26). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (Emphasis mine).

⁸ Rm 8:29-30, **For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.**

Also, cf. Gal 3:8 **The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.”**

1 Pt 1:1-2, 18-20 **To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood... For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.**

Eph 1:4-6 **For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love**

⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—

⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

⁹ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Ga 4:4–5). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Also cf. 1 Tm 2:5-6 (especially v.6), **For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time** (Emphasis mine).

¹⁰ My adaptation of the words of Van Dixhoorn (ibid:167)

So, yes, although God, before the world began, decreed who His elect would be and that He would justify them – and although God’s decrees can never change – we are not really & practically justified until we are convicted in our hearts and receive Jesus Christ in faith! You see, without the existence of *faith* in a sinner’s heart (faith in Jesus Christ), that sinner is not yet justified! Indeed, a person is not a Christian until he/she can say, “I *believe* in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died for my sins!”

And that’s why Christians are identified as *believers*!

You see, if someone were to say, “But, I was actually justified in eternity – long before the world began,” or if someone says, “Look, I was justified at Christ’s cross when He died for my sins,” then where does the Bible truth come in which says that we are justified by our God-given *faith*! After all, does not the Bible teach that there was once a time when we were alienated from God? Look, is that not what Col 1:21 says, “***Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior***”?

What’s more, if someone says, “I was justified before the world began” (or, “I was justified at the cross of Jesus when He died for me”), then, they’re forgetting the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives – *that work* about which our Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus, “***I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit,***” and, “***The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.***”

Therefore, properly speaking, a sinner is not justified until the Holy Spirit, in due time, actually applies Christ to his/her heart!

Children (young people), you already have the privilege of having been born from believing parents; and of hearing God’s Word; and of reading your own Bible! I so pray for the day that, through your Bible readings, the Holy Spirit will, in real time, actually apply Jesus Christ to your hearts!

We’ve come to point 3...

A Father’s Discipline

Here is an important Bible truth, i.e. that justified people (people who have been made right with God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit’s work) – such people still sin!!¹¹

Are you surprised?

Well, why else has our Lord Jesus (in Mt 6:12) taught us to pray, “***Forgive us our sins...***”?

So, granted, Christians *are* in a state of justification!

And, true, we cannot fall out of that state, because, just as Christ prayed for Peter that he would not fall, so our Lord prays the same for you & me (Lk 22:32)!

So, indeed, what our Lord Jesus once said *is* true of all His loved ones: “...***no one can snatch them out of My hand***” (Jn 10:28)!

So, yes, Christians cannot come under God’s *judicial* sentence, for Jesus took that sentence for us!

However, we must not forget, we can still come under God’s “fatherly displeasure.”

And, let no Christian say, “O, because *coming under His fatherly disapproval* is not so bad as *coming under His judicial (and eternal) condemnation*, I can now continue sinning!”

As the Apostle Paul says (in Rm 6:2), “***By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?***”

Besides, whilst you & I *are* in our justified state – and whilst we *do* have a loving and merciful Father – let us remember that His displeasure is nevertheless genuine, and like the righteous anger of an *earthly* father, the anger of our *heavenly* Father is not something under which you & I want to live!¹²

¹¹ Again, remember Paul’s words in Rm 7:15, ***I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.***

¹² My adaptation of the well-said words of Van Dixhoorn (ibid:169)

Or have we forgotten that God's discipline of His loved ones is painfully trying to bear, as King David confessed (in Ps 32:5),

*For day and night
your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was sapped
as in the heat of summer. Selah*
⁵*Then I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, "I will confess
my transgressions to the Lord"—
and you forgave
the guilt of my sin.* ¹³

My brother & sister, I realise that not every discipline comes because of a specific sin we have committed.¹⁴ But if, at the moment, you are tasting the Father's displeasure and discipline because of some or other specific sin, then remember that God shows us His displeasure *so that He may restore the light of His countenance (face) to us!*

Look, is that not what our OT passage says (in Ps 89:31-33)...?

*"...if they violate my decrees
and fail to keep my commands,
I will punish their sin with the rod,
their iniquity with flogging;
but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness.
I will not violate my covenant
or alter what my lips have uttered."* ¹⁵

See what our heavenly Father desires of His justified sinners?

He desires that we should humble ourselves under His discipline, *confess our sins, beg for His pardon, and renew our flagging (weakening) faith and our often-random repentance!*¹⁶

Here is the last very small point...

Justification in Old & New Testaments

WCF 11.6 reminds us that Old-Testament believers were justified in the same way that New-Testament believers are justified!

Abraham was justified through faith in the promises of God!

¹³ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Ps 32:4–5). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Also cf. Ps 51:7-12 *Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*

¹⁴ Cf. what God allowed for Job, and also cf. Jn 9:1-3 *As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.*

¹⁵ NIV1984

¹⁶ Van Dixhoorn (ibid:170)

And, although Abraham lived long before Jesus of Nazareth, yet the ground of Abraham's faith was the finished work of our Lord Jesus on the cross!

The only difference between Abraham and us is: Abraham lived before our Lord Jesus' atoning death, and we live after that death!

So, Abraham trusted that the promise *would be* fulfilled! But you & I trust that that same promise *was* fulfilled! So, our justification happens in the same way as Abraham's – i.e. by grace through faith in Jesus Christ!

But look, even the *signs* of the two covenants are essentially the same.

Circumcision was a sign of God's promise, to be received by faith! And so is baptism today!

In baptism – just as in circumcision – God promises that He will save the baby the minute that baby receives God's promises in faith (whenever that minute would be)!

Of course, the sign itself will not *save* the baby!

My brother & sister, here we have heard again the Gospel – the Good News – that we have nothing to do in an effort to try and earn our salvation, but that we are saved on the basis of Someone else's righteousness – that Someone being Jesus Christ!

And we give glory to God Triune!

AMEN (2563 words excluding footnotes)