



# Goahead Theological Seminary & College

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## Justification

Justification (Hebrew: הַקְדָּשׁ (tsedeq), Ancient Greek: δικαίωσις (dikaiōsis), Latin: justificatio, iustisia, English: justification, German: Rechtfertigung) can be defined as the legal act of God in which a sinner is declared righteous (made or declared to be righteous) based on the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. In other words, it means "being justified" or "being recognized as righteous." In Christian theology, it refers to the forgiveness of sins and inner renewal through atonement, and at the same time, sinners are declared righteous. In the Roman Catholic Church, justification is called "justification" (to become righteous), and it refers to the act, process, and state of being made righteous by God.

## Biblical Terms and Etymological Meanings

In the Old Testament, the term for justification is hitzdik (הִקְדִּיק, zedaqah), which is mostly used to mean to legally declare someone's status to be in accordance with the requirements of the law. In the New Testament, the noun justification (δικαίωσις) is the noun form of the verb dikaiō (δικαίω), meaning to declare someone righteous.

Righteousness (justice) is defined as uprightness, conformity to a standard, etc. The biblical usage of this word differs from its contemporary usage in two important respects: the scope of the word's meaning and the norm by which righteousness is measured. In modern usage, righteousness is limited to an ethical quality, conformity to ethical standards. These standards, in turn, are relative and dependent on the norms of society or groups. However, in biblical usage, the standard is consistently God's righteousness, not societal norms. Because biblical thinking is not relative but is governed by a God-centered standard, we can only understand the concept of righteousness if we begin with God's righteousness.

## God's righteousness,

First, there is God's nature, such as His righteousness and holiness. In contrast to the gods of the surrounding empires, the God of Israel does not act arbitrarily or according to his whims, makes unreasonable demands, acts stubbornly, and



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is fair in his dealings. He also demands righteous conduct from His people and judges them according to His laws. In this way, human righteousness is evaluated by the most stringent standards and reaches its highest ethical conclusion.

Second, God's righteousness is God's act and the means by which God establishes that righteousness in the world. The prophets develop the idea that God vindicates His people and establishes righteousness for them. In this way, the ethical meaning of righteousness is supplemented by a salvific meaning: the liberation, or salvation, that God accomplishes for His people.

Third, God's righteousness is the result of God's action, the fulfillment of His purpose. This aspect emphasizes the eschatological nature of this word and forms part of Israel's messianic hope, that is, the longing for a world where righteousness exists. Paul was able to view the gospel as a revelation of God's righteousness because of its dynamic nature. The coming of Jesus Christ as Israel's Messiah is God's act of righteousness, accomplishing salvation for His people. This does not imply a slackening of ethical demands. Rather, the coming of Christ signifies a sharpening of ethical sense, as the Sermon on the Mount demonstrates. It is a vision of the one way, and only through that way can God's demands for righteousness be satisfied. Because of their self-centeredness, humans cannot achieve the true worship and service of God that is demanded of them. He suffers from the guilt of demands he cannot fulfill, is alienated from God, the source of his life, and is unable to overcome his self-centeredness. Because of this, his chair of courage is broken. The fulfillment of God's righteousness is possible only when God does something to make it possible. This is what God teaches in the person of Jesus Christ, the righteous one. Righteousness is thus primarily God's righteousness, what God demands of man to conform to His own holiness, what God gives through faith in Christ, and the result of this act, that is, life in Christ who perfects this righteousness in love for one's neighbor (-Warren A. Quanbeck: Righteousness). There are several original words translated as righteousness, but in Hebrew nouns, the two forms [tzedek] (masculine) and [tzedah-ka-] (feminine) are typical, with the masculine form appearing 117 times and the feminine 155 times. In addition, there is [mishpat], which is often translated as [righteousness]. This is a word with a broad meaning that also means [judgment], [decree], etc., and is used with almost the same meaning as the word above in the meaning of [righteousness]. However, while [mishpat] may have an ethical meaning superior to



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[tzedek][tzedah-ka-] in some cases, this one has a superior legal meaning. In Greek nouns, the original word translated as [righteousness] is [dikaïoma dikaivwma] (dikaïoma) ten times and [dikaïo-sis dikaivwsi] (dikaïosis) twice. In short, this is understood as an extension of the concept of "righteousness" in the Old Testament, a relational concept expressing God's relationship with humanity, or the relationship between humans based on this relationship (e.g., love). This term is a crucial theological concept in Paul's letters, but it appears relatively rarely (34 times) in other writings, and is deeply connected to the ideological commons of Judaism at the time. Justification, originally a legal term, refers to being found innocent in a trial. Legally, it means to be found not guilty. However, in the Bible, it refers to being granted the righteousness of a sinless person in a personal relationship with God. Justification through faith in Christ is the core and fundamental principle of Paul's gospel faith. In the Old Testament, human righteousness consisted in observing the law, which manifested God's righteousness. The history of Israel recorded in the Old Testament demonstrates that not everyone was able to fulfill the demands of the Law. Humanity failed to respond directly to the Law's demands, and therefore, not only could not be saved by the Law, but it only led to the realization of sin (Romans 3:20). Therefore, God adopted a new method of justifying humanity. It was through grace, through the cross of Jesus Christ, who became the atoning sacrifice for sin. Humans are justified only by faith in Christ. Through this work of salvation, God enforces His own righteousness, and humans are justified by faith (Rom. 3:21-26). The believer's new life entirely depends on the grace of this justification (Rom. 5:1-). → Righteousness. In the Old Testament, the original word is a translation of the causative form (hiph form) of the verb [tsadaq qd'x:(tsadaq)], and is used as "justify," especially regarding God's character (Isa. 50:8, vindicate). Or it is quoted about the history of salvation of Yahweh's servant (Isaiah 53:11, to be accounted righteous). In the New Testament, [dikaïou- dikaïow (dikaïoo) righteousness] is written in the passive voice (dikaïou'sqai), and is translated as [is justified]. It mainly refers to forgiveness of sins and salvation through Christ (Romans 3:28, 5:1, 9, Galatians 1:16, etc.), and the fact that it is expressed in the passive voice shows that salvation is by absolute grace from God.



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## Historical Understanding of Justification

The meaning of this term has changed before and after the Reformation.

### Before the Reformation

This includes concepts from the early church and medieval scholasticism. Roman Catholic justification focuses on process rather than temporality. That is, justification begins at infant baptism, and through the infusion of God's grace (the infusion of righteousness), changes occur in one's lifestyle and behavior. Ultimate justification is entirely dependent on the actions of the recipient. In other words, justification and sanctification remain complexly intertwined, leading to the conclusion that one is justified by works. However, the actions of believers can never be completely righteous, and they remain in a state of lacking the assurance of salvation, going to a place called purgatory to be judged.

### After the Reformation

Since the time of the religious reformer Martin Luther, the doctrine of justification has been a central principle. He was the first to advocate justification by faith alone. John Calvin, who shared Luther's ideas, viewed justification as union with Christ. Union with Christ is the core of his soteriology. In his Institutes of the Christian Religion, the religious reformer John Calvin explains: When we are exempted from the righteousness of human works and grasp the righteousness of Christ through faith, we are justified by faith, clothed in righteousness, and appear before God as righteous, not sinners. This is justification. God accepts us into His favor as righteous. Therefore, we say that justification consists of the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness.

## Puritan

John Owen argued that the Roman Catholic Church had confused justification with sanctification (Christianity) because the Latin words for justification, *justificatio* and *justifico*, meant "making a person innately righteous." He reinterpreted the Greek word "*dikaiosune*" (*dikaiosune*) in a "forensic" sense, a more objective, declarative meaning in a courtroom. He also emphasized the



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meaning of imputation, arguing that the Hebrew word for righteousness, "zadak," meant to declare someone righteous.

## **Discussion of new perspectives**

Paul's new perspective on justification has been reinterpreted and debated by British scholars such as E. P. Sanders, Tom Wright, and James Dunn. Those advocating for the New Perspective interpret Paul's letters based on first-century Judaism. They criticize the doctrine of justification by faith (salvation by faith) advocated by the religious reformers Luther and Calvin, emphasizing justification in the future, perfect eschatological context. In terms of salvation, a major controversy is being raised by re-asserting the action-eschatological element of justification, thereby reinterpreting the core claim of traditional Protestantism's legal justification from a new perspective.

## **For the reconciliation of doctrinal differences**

In 1999, the Roman Catholic Church, Lutheran Church, Anglican Church, Methodist Church, and Reformed Church issued the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification," declaring that although doctrinal differences arose depending on where each denomination placed its emphasis, the overall framework was the same.

Differences in doctrinal interpretations of the means of justification have distinguished Protestantism from the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Church, and Oriental Orthodox Church. In Protestantism, the doctrine of justification by faith alone, that is, righteousness without works, was established by Martin Luther.

Catholicism and Orthodoxy primarily use the term "justification," viewing it as beginning with baptism, ending with the Eucharist, and ultimately becoming aligned with Yahweh's will and purpose. These three are organically harmonized, and reconciliation ultimately leads to perfect glorification. Furthermore, "infusion of righteousness" is another distinctive Catholic doctrine of justification. That is, Yahweh pours His grace into the human soul, filling it with His grace over time. In particular, faith demonstrated through charity and good deeds is believed to justify sinners.



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Protestantism holds that the transfer of righteousness to totally depraved humans is accomplished through faith and grace in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Justification is seen solely through faith, and good works do not maintain or constitute a prerequisite for justification. The growth of personal holiness is distinct from justification, and is considered part of sanctification.

## **Interpretation by denomination**

There are significant differences in the theories of justification among the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Church, and Protestant denominations. Lutheranism and Calvinism hold that a person is justified solely by faith, without good works. Conversely, the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Church believe that salvation is completed only after living according to God's will in this life through baptism (sanctification). In theological terms, Catholic justification is called "effective justification" (*justificatio effectiva*), while Protestant justification is called "forensic justification" (*justificatio forensis*).

## **Protestant**

Justification is a fundamental concept of Protestant Christian doctrine. Justification is a core theological theme that led Martin Luther to initiate the Reformation, and is referred to as justification by faith alone, a passive form of justification. In Christian theology, justification is the act by which God transfers a sinner from a state of sin to a state of righteousness, a change in the condition of a person who has been transferred from a state of sin to a state of righteousness. Specifically, in Protestantism, it is the act of God declaring a repentant sinner to be righteous (the act of acquittal). Through Augustine, Luther became convinced that justification is not a work of the law or merit, but a gift of God's grace, based on the concept of God's righteousness in Romans 1 (Aber ich wil bey S. Augustino bleiben, sonderlich aber bey dem herrn Christo, der do hatt das wortt der warheit).

## **Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification**





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The Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church formed a subcommittee of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Committee in 1986. After several meetings, they began drafting a document on the doctrine of justification in 1993. A joint statement was drafted in 1994, and the statement was completed in 1997. However, its official release was delayed due to various issues, including internal disagreements. Finally, on October 31, 1999, in Augsburg, Germany, Cardinal Cassidy of the Pontifical Commission for Promoting Christian Unity and President Krauser of the Lutheran World Federation signed a joint declaration on the doctrine of justification. Then, on July 23, 2006, the World Methodist Council joined in, and the three denominations signed the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (hereinafter referred to as the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification).