

BIBLE TRUTHS EXPLAINED

What the Bible Teaches About

JUSTIFICATION

Revised Edition, 2026

GORDON LYONS

ESV Edition

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Bible Truths Explained

Justification

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Justification

Table of Contents

IMPORTANT NOTICE.....	ii
COPYRIGHT NOTICES.....	iii
Permitted Charges and Payments	iii
Translation Information.....	iii
PRINCIPAL WORKS CONSULTED	v
Justification	vii
PART 1	1
Synopsis: Justification	1
Note 1: Mankind Condemned	1
Scripture References (ESV) <i>Mankind Condemned</i>	1
Note 2: Meaning of Justification.....	2
Scripture References (ESV) <i>Meaning of Justification</i>	3
Note 3: Justification is Not Sanctification	4
Scripture References (ESV) <i>Justification is Not Sanctification</i>	4
Note 4: Imputed Righteousness	5
Scripture References (ESV) <i>Imputed Righteousness</i>	5
Note 4: Vicarious or Substitutionary Sacrifice	6
Scripture References (ESV) <i>Vicarious or Substitutionary Sacrifice</i>	7
Related Bible Truths.....	7
Part 1 Summary.....	9
PART 2	12
Doctrine of Justification: Explanation of Terms	12
Part 2 Summary.....	15
PART 3	18
Outline of Justification.....	18
Part 3 Summary.....	21
PART 4	24
The Whole World Stands Condemned.....	24
Part 4 Summary.....	26
PART 5	28

The Law Cannot Justify	28
Good Deeds Cannot Justify.....	28
Justification for Perfect Obedience.....	29
Justification is Not Pardon Alone	30
Part 5 Summary.....	31
PART 6	34
Justification through Faith	34
No Justification without Atonement.....	35
The Atoning Blood of Christ.....	36
Forgiveness and Justification Require an Atoning Sacrifice.....	37
God is Just in Justifying the Ungodly.....	38
Part 6 Summary.....	40
PART 7	43
Imputed Righteousness	43
The Believer's Sin and Christ's Righteousness	43
Imputation of Sin and Righteousness	44
To Justify is to Declare Righteous.....	45
To Justify is Not to Make Righteous	45
No Perfection in This Life	46
Part 7 Summary.....	48
PART 8	51
No Justification Without Sanctification.....	51
A Man Reaps What He Sows.....	53
Part 8 Summary.....	56
PART 9	59
Justification By Faith and Works (1)	59
The Initial Act of Justification.....	59
Justification By Faith and Works (2)	62
Relation of Faith to Works	63
Part 9 Summary.....	65
Final Summary	67
Justification	67

PART 1

Synopsis: Justification

Justification is a judicial declaration that all the claims of God's justice upon a sinner have been fully met and satisfied; that all the demands of God's holy and righteous law have been fulfilled, and that all the penalties for transgression of that law have been fully paid. The justified sinner's past, present, and future sin has been taken into account, and all has been atoned for and forgiven. None of this has been achieved by the sinner himself. Rather, all of God's demands against the sinner have been met by a sinless substitute—Jesus, the Son of God. From before the creation of the world, God appointed his Son to be the Lamb slain for the sins of his people. He is the perfect atoning sacrifice for sinful men and women. In virtue of his vicarious and atoning death, and on account of his subsequent resurrection, God imputes the perfect righteousness of his Son to all who believe on him. Through their faith in Christ, God fully and forever justifies them or declares them righteous in his sight.

Note 1: Mankind Condemned

Because of their depravity and sin (i.e. inherent corruption derived from Adam, and actual personal sin), God declares all mankind guilty. For their sin and guilt, all unregenerate mankind is abiding under the sentence of condemnation and under God's just and holy wrath. Unless the righteous demands of God's law are fully met, their sin atoned for, and the penalty of sin paid in full, this declaration of guilt and condemnation against fallen and sinful mankind will remain in force. Ultimately, if they remain impenitent to the end, they will perish for all eternity. If sinners are to be delivered from the holy and just wrath of God, a way must be found whereby those who previously have been declared 'guilty' and condemned, can now be declared 'not guilty' and justified. (Ps. 1:18-32; 2:5-16; 3:9-19)

Scripture References (ESV)

Mankind Condemned

Romans 1:18-20

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (See vv.21-23)

Romans 1:32

³² Though they know God's decree that those who practise such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practise them. (See vv.24-31)

Romans 2:5-6

⁵ But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgement will be revealed.

⁶ He will render to each one according to his works: {*Psalm 62:12; Prov. 24:12*}. (See Rom. 2:1-4)

Romans 2:7-9

⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. ⁹ There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, (See vv.10-16; cf. v.8 with Rom. 1:18; 2 Thess. 1:6-10)

Romans 3:9-12

⁹ What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written:

“None is righteous, no, not one;

¹¹ no one understands;
no one seeks for God.

¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one.”

{*Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Eccles. 7:20*}. (See Rom. 3:13-18)

Romans 3:19

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. (Cf. v.23; cf. also John 3:18,36)

Note 2: Meaning of Justification

In the Bible, ‘to justify’ means ‘to declare righteous’ or ‘to pronounce righteous’. It is important to realise that the term ‘to justify’ is a forensic or legal term that declares a person to be righteous in the eyes of the law—in this case, God’s law. Justification effects the immediate acquittal of the repentant and believing sinner from guilt and condemnation, and declares him to be righteous in the sight of God. Justification, therefore, consists of two distinct elements:

1. *Forgiveness of sin*, and
2. *Imputation of righteousness*.

Scripture References (ESV)**Meaning of Justification****Romans 3:20**

²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. (See vv.9-19)

Romans 3:21-24

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, (See vv.25-28; cf. vv.21-22 with Rom. 1:17; Phil. 3:9)

Romans 4:4-5

⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, (See vv.1-3)

Romans 4:6-8

⁶ just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

⁷ “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered;

⁸ blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”
{*Psalm 32:1,2*}. (See Rom. 4:9-16)

Romans 8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.¹
(See vv.2-4)

¹ Romans 8:1 Some manuscripts add *who walk not according to the flesh (but according to the Spirit)* (ESV footnote)

Note 3: Justification is Not Sanctification

The act of justification does not change a person's character, thereby making that person inwardly or inherently righteous or holy. Again, the act of justification does infuse righteousness or holiness into that person. The believer's character and conduct is initially renewed at regeneration. The Holy Spirit continues to transform the believer's life after the likeness of Christ (from one degree of glory to another) through the ongoing and life-long process of sanctification. It is this process—the process of sanctification—which changes the inward man, and which produces the fruit of holiness in the lives of God's children. (Rom. 8:5-14; 2 Cor. 3:17-18; 1 Thess. 4:2-8)

Scripture References (ESV)*Justification is Not Sanctification***Romans 8:5-8**

⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (See vv.1-4)

Romans 8:9-11

⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Romans 8:12-14

¹² So then, brothers,² we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons³ of God. (See vv.15-17)

² *brothers*: [Romans 8:12](#) Or *brothers and sisters*; also verse [29](#) (ESV footnote)

³ *sons*: [Romans 8:14](#); Greek, υἱός **huios**, *son, child* (of either gender).

1 Corinthians 3:17-18

¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

¹⁸ Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. (See vv.7-16)

1 Thessalonians 4:2-8

² For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. ³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honour, ⁵ not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶ that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. ⁷ For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. ⁸ Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. (See v.1; cf. 1 Cor. 6:12-20)

Note 4: Imputed Righteousness

A person whom God has justified or declared righteous has not been justified on the ground of his own righteousness. The sinner's own inherent moral qualities, such as 'uprightness of character', are totally unacceptable to God since they are thoroughly corrupted by that person's sin. The righteousness which God sees in the believing sinner—and by which he has been justified—is the righteousness of God's own Son. The believer stands before God 'clothed' or 'covered' with the perfect righteousness of Christ. On this ground alone God justifies him or declares him righteous. This righteousness of Christ that God has credited to the believer's account is known as *imputed* righteousness.

Scripture References (ESV)*Imputed Righteousness*

Isaiah 53:4-5

⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.

⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his stripes we are healed.
(See vv.1-3; cf. 1 Pet. 2:24)

Isaiah 53:6

⁶ 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.
(See vv.7-9; cf. 1 Pet. 2:25)

Isaiah 53:11

¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities. (See vv.10,12)

Isaiah 64:6-7

⁶ We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
⁷ There is no one who calls upon your name,
who rouses himself to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.
(See vv.1-8)

2 Corinthians 5:21

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we
might become the righteousness of God. (See vv.18-20)

Philippians 3:9

⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes
from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the
righteousness from God that depends on faith— (See vv.4-8)

Note 4: Vicarious or Substitutionary Sacrifice

God forgives and justifies a sinner only because all the righteous demands of his holy law have been fully met, and his justice has been completely satisfied. By himself, a sinner is incapable of meeting the demands of God's holy law, or of satisfying God's justice. If a repentant sinner is to be justified in God's sight, another person—*with no sin of his own*—must meet all the demands of God's law, and satisfy God's justice on the sinner's behalf. Christ was the only person capable of keeping the law of God in its entirety, and of meeting all of God's righteous demands on the sinner's behalf. This he did by his life of perfect obedience to God's law, and by his atoning death on the cross. Since the Son of

God obeyed, suffered and died *as a substitute* for sinners, his sacrifice of atonement is known as a *vicarious* sacrifice.

Scripture References (ESV) *Vicarious or Substitutionary Sacrifice***Romans 3:22-26**

²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ 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. (See vv.21-31)

1 Peter 1:18-20

¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. ²⁰ He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you ²¹ who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. (See vv.13-23)

1 Peter 2:22-24

²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. {*Isaiah 53:9*} ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. (See vv.18-25; cf. v. 24 with Isa. 53:5)

Related Bible Truths

Closely related to the doctrine of justification are the doctrines of regeneration, adoption and sanctification. When, by effectual calling, the Holy Spirit regenerates a person and makes him or her able and willing to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that person is justified. Having been justified (declared righteous) by the grace of God, he or she is adopted into the household and family of God. Having received the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit, the believer is thereafter being sanctified

by the Spirit. This process continues throughout the believer's life until they reach heaven's glory. There, God completes and perfects the believer's sanctification in glorification.⁴

Summary below

⁴ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Regeneration; Adoption; Sanctification*.

Part 1 Summary

BTE10 Summary — Justification (ESV Edition)

Definition

Justification is God's **judicial declaration** that a believing sinner is righteous in His sight. It is a legal act whereby God forgives all the sinner's sins and credits to them the **perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ**. Justification is grounded entirely in Christ's **substitutionary death and resurrection**, received through faith alone, and not earned by human works or personal righteousness.

Key Truths

1. **Universal condemnation** — all mankind is guilty before God because of sin and stands under His righteous judgment.
 2. **Judicial declaration** — justification means to declare righteous, not to make righteous inwardly.
 3. **Twofold blessing** — justification includes:
 - Forgiveness of sins.
 - Imputation of Christ's righteousness.
 4. **By grace through faith** — sinners are justified as a gift of God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ.
 5. **Apart from works** — no one can be justified by obedience to God's law or by personal merit.
 6. **Imputed righteousness** — believers are accepted because Christ's righteousness is credited to their account.
 7. **Substitutionary atonement** — Christ fulfilled God's law and bore the penalty of sin on behalf of His people.
 8. **No condemnation** — those who are justified in Christ are permanently acquitted before God.
 9. **Distinct from sanctification** — justification changes a believer's legal standing before God; sanctification changes the believer's character and conduct.
-

Biblical Foundations

1. **Romans 3:23-24** — all have sinned; believers are justified freely by God's grace.
 2. **Romans 3:26** — God is both just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus.
 3. **Romans 4:5** — God justifies the ungodly through faith.
 4. **Romans 4:7-8** — blessed are those whose sins are forgiven.
 5. **Romans 8:1** — "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."
 6. **Isaiah 53:5-6** — Christ bore our sins and suffered in our place.
 7. **Isaiah 53:11** — many are accounted righteous through the Servant's work.
 8. **2 Corinthians 5:21** — Christ became sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
 9. **Philippians 3:9** — righteousness comes through faith in Christ, not through our own works.
 10. **1 Peter 2:24** — Christ bore our sins in His body on the tree.
-

Practical Implications

1. **Assurance of salvation** — believers can know they are fully accepted by God because of Christ.
 2. **Freedom from condemnation** — past, present, and future sins have been fully dealt with in Christ.
 3. **Humility** — justification removes all grounds for boasting since salvation is entirely by grace.
 4. **Gratitude and worship** — believers respond with thankfulness for Christ's sacrifice and righteousness.
 5. **Motivation for holiness** — justification leads naturally into sanctification and a life of obedience.
 6. **Confidence before God** — believers approach God as those fully accepted in Christ.
 7. **Hope of glory** — justification begins a salvation that ultimately culminates in glorification.
-

** Summary Sentence**

Justification is God's gracious legal declaration that believing sinners are forgiven, clothed in Christ's righteousness, and forever accepted in His sight on the basis of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice alone.

PART 2**Doctrine of Justification: Explanation of Terms**

1. Justification:	To justify means to declare righteous or to pronounce righteous. Justification consists of the following two elements: (a) Forgiveness of sin. (b) Imputation of righteousness. Justification does not make a person inwardly righteous; i.e. it does not alter a person's moral character, thereby making him holy in all manner of life or conduct. Holiness of life is the resultant fruit of regeneration and sanctification—not justification.
2. Righteousness:	This word is used in two distinctly different senses: (a) The moral sense. (b) The legal or forensic sense. In the moral sense, righteousness is equivalent to uprightness of character. (See further below, under <i>Inherent Righteousness</i>.) In the legal or forensic sense, righteousness is equivalent to being free from condemnation. Thus a person whom the law has declared 'not guilty', is said to be justified or righteous in the eyes of the law. (His justification and acquittal, however, has not somehow made him a morally righteous person.) It is in this legal or forensic sense that the Bible speaks of sinners being justified. When God justifies a person, he declares that person to be legally righteous in his sight. Although, therefore, not inherently righteous, the justified sinner <i>is considered to be</i> morally righteous with the imputed righteousness of Christ.

- 3. Inherent righteousness:** Inherent righteousness is the innate moral goodness or uprightness of character that a person may possess. This inherent goodness or moral rectitude is seen in those people who endeavour to live honest and upright lives, and who do many commendable works of charity or benevolence. Uprightness of character, however, can never commend a person to God nor can it contribute in any way toward that person's redemption. Man's inherent 'righteousness' is thoroughly contaminated by his sin. However worthy and commendable may be his motives, a man's innate moral rectitude has its source in that person's fallen, sinful nature. The works of an unregenerate and unsanctified nature, however, are utterly abhorrent to God. Because the sinful nature pollutes the whole soul, any righteousness proceeding from this source must fall immeasurably far short of that perfect righteousness that God's law demands. As far as God is concerned, there is none righteous; no, not one (Rom. 3:10). In God's eyes, all our acts of righteousness—all our best intentions and endeavours—are like filthy rags or a polluted garment. (Isa. 64:6)
- 4. Imputed righteousness:** Imputed righteousness is that righteousness which God freely credits to a believing sinner's account. It is the righteousness of another person (Christ) which, by grace, God reckons or credits to the believer. For this reason it is sometimes spoken of as 'a righteousness from God'; * i.e. a righteousness that comes from God, and which he freely bestows upon the repentant sinner. Unlike inherent righteousness, which cannot justify a sinner in the sight of God, imputed righteousness can and does justify a sinner in God's sight. Everyone who repents and believes on Jesus Christ as his Saviour and Lord is thus freely justified through faith, and on the grounds of Christ's redeeming work on that person's behalf. This finished work includes the bearing of that person's sin and guilt at Calvary, and the imputing of Christ's perfect righteousness to the believing sinner's account.
- * Rom. 1:17; 3:21-22; Phil. 3:9
- 5. Imparted righteousness:** Imparted righteousness is that righteousness which the Holy Spirit conveys to the believer through the Word of God, during the ongoing process of sanctification. In ever-increasing measure, the believer is being sanctified or made holy as the Spirit of holiness moulds his character and conduct after the likeness of Christ, and in ever greater conformity to Christ himself. The process of sanctification culminates in a person's glorification when that person is taken into the immediate presence of the Lord in heaven.

6. Propitiation:

A propitiation is an acceptable satisfaction for sin: a satisfaction that is able to turn aside or appease the righteous wrath of God against the sinner. As a satisfaction, it must meet every requirement of God's just and holy law to the full. God demands perfect obedience to, or total compliance with, his law—in every detail. For every transgression or falling short of this perfect standard, God requires that a propitiation (i.e., a satisfaction) be made. To secure our redemption from the curse and the penalty of the law—and from our sin and guilt—God set forth his only Son as a propitiation or sacrifice of atonement for our sins (Rom. 3:25). The propitiation effected by the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ, the Lamb of God, provides a full and permanent satisfaction to God for the sins of all his people. This applies to all generations of God's redeemed people throughout the ages. Expiation is a related term.

7. Atonement:

Atonement is an act, whereby, by means of a propitiatory or atoning and substitutionary sacrifice, God reconciles sinful men and women to himself. In his fallen and unregenerate state, man is at enmity with God by wicked works. (Col. 1:21) So long as he remains guilty and polluted because of sin, he is abiding under the wrath and curse of God. He has incurred sin's penalty, which is death: spiritual death—subsequently to be followed by physical death and eternal death—unless he be redeemed and reconciled to God. To effect man's forgiveness and reconciliation, the demands of God's holy law must be met in full, and atonement must be made for all his sin. This can be achieved only by perfect obedience and by the shedding of innocent blood on the sinner's behalf: for it is the blood (i.e., the perfect life sacrificed) that makes atonement for the soul (Lev. 17:11,14; Heb. 9:22). The victim required for the sacrifice of atonement must be spotless, faultless, and in all respects unblemished or perfect. As the Lamb of God, Christ was the perfect Victim whose blood was shed as a once-for-all sacrifice of atonement. Christ made this perfect sacrifice for the sins of his people, to effect their eternal redemption and to reconcile them to God.

8. Vicarious:

Vicarious means substitutionary. A person who substitutes for another is acting vicariously; i.e. he is taking someone else's place. When we say that Christ's obedience, sufferings and death were vicarious, we mean that he obeyed, suffered and died as a substitute for others. Christ obeyed the law of God perfectly for us, and he bore the guilt and penalty of our sins on his own body to the tree. On that tree, he endured the terrible wrath of God against sin, and in place of the sinner (Rom. 5:6-11; 1 Pet. 2:24).

Summary below

Part 2 Summary

BTE10 Summary — Justification (ESV Edition)

Part 2: Explanation of Terms

Definition

Justification is God's **legal declaration** that a sinner who believes in Christ is righteous in His sight. This declaration rests not upon the sinner's own righteousness but upon the **imputed righteousness of Christ**. Justification includes the **forgiveness of sins** and the **crediting of Christ's righteousness** to the believer's account. It is distinct from sanctification, which is the ongoing work of making the believer holy in character and conduct.

Key Truths

1. **Justification defined** — to justify means to declare or pronounce righteous before God's court.
 2. **Two elements of justification** —
 - Forgiveness of sins.
 - Imputation of Christ's righteousness.
 3. **Legal, not moral** — justification changes a person's standing before God, not their inward character.
 4. **Inherent righteousness is insufficient** — human goodness, morality, and good works cannot justify a sinner before God.
 5. **Imputed righteousness saves** — believers are accepted because Christ's righteousness is credited to them.
 6. **Imparted righteousness sanctifies** — the Holy Spirit progressively produces holiness in believers through sanctification.
 7. **Christ is the propitiation** — His sacrifice fully satisfied God's justice and turned away God's righteous wrath against sin.
 8. **Atonement reconciles sinners to God** — Christ's sacrificial death removed guilt and secured redemption for His people.
 9. **Christ's work is vicarious** — Jesus obeyed, suffered, and died as the substitute for sinners.
-

Biblical Foundations

1. **Romans 1:17** — the righteousness of God is revealed through faith.
 2. **Romans 3:21-22** — God's righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ.
 3. **Romans 3:25** — Christ was presented as a propitiation by His blood.
 4. **Philippians 3:9** — believers possess a righteousness that comes from God through faith.
 5. **Isaiah 64:6** — human righteousness is like polluted garments before God.
 6. **Leviticus 17:11** — atonement is made through the shedding of blood.
 7. **Hebrews 9:22** — without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.
 8. **Colossians 1:21** — sinners are naturally alienated from God.
 9. **Romans 5:6-11** — Christ died for sinners and reconciled them to God.
 10. **1 Peter 2:24** — Christ bore our sins in His body on the tree.
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Practical Implications

1. **No confidence in self** — salvation cannot be earned through moral effort or good works.
 2. **Confidence in Christ alone** — believers rest entirely upon Christ's perfect righteousness.
 3. **Assurance of acceptance** — God accepts believers because of Christ's obedience and sacrifice.
 4. **Humility before God** — all boasting is excluded since justification is entirely by grace.
 5. **Growth in holiness** — while justification does not make us holy, it leads into a life of sanctification.
 6. **Grateful worship** — believers respond with thanksgiving for Christ's substitutionary sacrifice.
 7. **Peace with God** — Christ's atonement removes enmity and reconciles believers to God.
 8. **Eternal security in Christ** — the believer's standing rests on Christ's finished work, not personal performance.
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 Summary Sentence

Justification is God's legal declaration that believing sinners are forgiven and counted righteous through Christ's imputed righteousness, secured by His substitutionary atonement and received through faith alone.

PART 3

Outline of Justification

We may outline the principal points included in the doctrine of justification as follows:

1. Justification comprises two elements: (a) The forgiveness of sin. (b) The imputation of righteousness.	Acts 10:43; 13:38-39; Rom. 4:22-25; cf. Ps. 32:1-2
2. Justification is a once-for-all act whereby God forgives the sinner and declares that person to be righteous in his sight.	John 5:24; Rom. 4:3-8; Heb. 10:10,14
3. Justification is an act of grace to the sinner. The sinner deserves only condemnation when, in grace, God justifies him.	Luke 18:9-14; Rom. 3:22-24; 5:6-8
4. Justification is a forensic or judicial act. As a Judge, God declares a sinner to be righteous—but this does not make that person inherently righteous. It does not effect a change in that person's character; thereby making him holy in life and conduct. As has been stated above, holiness of life and conduct is the fruit of regeneration and sanctification—not justification.	Rom. 7:15-25 (cf. Gal. 5:16-18); Phil. 3:9; 1 Thess. 4:3-8
5. The person whom God has justified can no longer be condemned. Justification is the opposite of condemnation; and to justify a person is to declare that he is not condemned. By his meritorious and redeeming work, Christ has met in full all claims against the sinner.	Rom. 5:9-10; 8:1-4; 31-34

6. In justification, God imputes Christ's perfect righteousness to the believer's account. Thus, by God's grace, the believer is entitled to plead at the bar of God as though that righteousness were personally and inherently his own.	2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:26-27; Heb. 10:19-23
7. The sole ground of our justification is the righteousness of Christ, both active and passive. The <i>active</i> righteousness of Christ includes his perfect obedience to the entire law of God; both for himself, and for us. The <i>passive</i> righteousness of Christ includes his enduring the penalty of God's law—not for himself—but in our stead, and for us alone.	Isa. 52:13 — 53:12; Phil. 2:6-11 (cf. vv.10-11 with Isa. 45:23); 1 Pet. 2:22-24
8. A person whom God has justified, and who has been clothed with the imputed and perfect righteousness of Christ, is considered as though he had never sinned. This does not imply that he has no sin: but, in the sight of God, his sin—past, present and future—has been atoned for, once-for-all, by the sacrifice of Christ. By God's grace, therefore, the justified believer is entitled to the reward promised or due to perfect righteousness.	Ps. 32:1-2; Col. 1:21-22; Heb. 9:12-15
9. God does not justify us on the grounds of good works, good deeds, works of charity, works of righteousness, or any other kind of works. Nothing done by us, or wrought in us, can satisfy the demands of God's justice. Justification must come from outside of ourselves, and must have nothing to do with our 'good works', our 'acts of righteousness', or our feeble and futile attempts to keep the moral law.	Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:15-16; Gal. 3:10-14 (cf. v.11 with Hab.2:4; cf. v.12 with Lev. 18:5; cf. v.13 with Deut. 21:23)
10. God justifies us by grace through faith—and by grace through faith alone. This faith does not originate from within ourselves. God freely gives it to us as a gift of his sovereign and unmerited	Rom. 1:16-17; Rom. 10:4-13 (cf. v.5 with Lev. 18:5; cf. vv.6-7 with Deut. 30:12-13;

grace. This kind of faith is known as <i>saving</i> faith. The object of our faith is the Son of God, and his redeeming work on our behalf. Everyone whom God has given to his Son from eternity, is granted the gifts of repentance and faith. Everyone whom the Holy Spirit thus enables to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is justified. And everyone who repents and believes does so freely and willingly.	cf. v.11 with Isa. 28:16; cf. v.13 with Joel 2:32); Eph. 2:8-10
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Summary below

Part 3 Summary

BTE10 Summary — Justification (ESV Edition)

Part 3: Outline of Justification

Definition

Justification is God's **once-for-all judicial act** whereby He forgives a sinner's sins and declares that person righteous in His sight. This declaration is based entirely upon the **imputed righteousness of Christ**, received through faith alone, and not upon any works, merit, or righteousness found within the sinner.

Key Truths

1. **Twofold nature** — justification includes:
 - Forgiveness of sins.
 - Imputation of Christ's righteousness.
 2. **Once-for-all declaration** — justification is a complete and permanent act that never needs to be repeated.
 3. **An act of grace** — God justifies those who deserve condemnation, solely because of His mercy and grace.
 4. **A legal verdict** — justification is a forensic declaration, not a transformation of character.
 5. **Opposite of condemnation** — the justified believer is forever freed from God's judicial condemnation.
 6. **Christ's righteousness credited to believers** — God imputes the perfect righteousness of Christ to those who believe.
 7. **Grounded in Christ's active and passive obedience** —
 - **Active righteousness:** Christ's perfect obedience to God's law.
 - **Passive righteousness:** Christ's suffering and death in the sinner's place.
 8. **Full acceptance before God** — believers are regarded as fully righteous because Christ has atoned for all their sins.
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9. **Not by works** — no human effort, morality, charity, or law-keeping can contribute to justification.
 10. **By grace through faith alone** — justification is received through God-given saving faith in Jesus Christ.
-

Biblical Foundations

1. **Acts 10:43** — everyone who believes receives forgiveness of sins through Christ.
 2. **Acts 13:38-39** — believers are justified through Jesus from what the law could not accomplish.
 3. **Romans 4:22-25** — righteousness is counted to those who believe.
 4. **Romans 3:20** — no one is justified by works of the law.
 5. **Romans 1:16-17** — the righteousness of God is revealed through faith.
 6. **Romans 5:9-10** — believers are justified by Christ's blood and reconciled to God.
 7. **Romans 8:1-4** — no condemnation remains for those in Christ.
 8. **2 Corinthians 5:21** — believers receive the righteousness of God in Christ.
 9. **Galatians 2:15-16** — justification comes through faith in Christ, not works of the law.
 10. **Ephesians 2:8-10** — salvation is by grace through faith, God's gift.
 11. **Hebrews 10:19-23** — believers confidently approach God through Christ's finished work.
 12. **1 Peter 2:22-24** — Christ bore our sins as our substitute.
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Practical Implications

1. **Assurance of salvation** — believers can rest in God's completed verdict of righteousness.
 2. **Freedom from guilt** — Christ has fully satisfied God's justice on behalf of His people.
 3. **Confidence before God** — believers may approach God through Christ's righteousness, not their own.
 4. **Humility and gratitude** — justification excludes all human boasting and magnifies God's grace.
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5. **Dependence on Christ alone** — salvation rests entirely on Christ's obedience and sacrifice.
 6. **Motivation for holiness** — justification leads believers into a life of sanctification and obedience.
 7. **Peace with God** — reconciliation with God has already been secured through Christ.
 8. **Security in God's promises** — those whom God justifies can never again come under condemnation.
-

Summary Sentence

Justification is God's gracious and permanent declaration that believing sinners are forgiven and counted righteous through the imputed righteousness of Christ, received by faith alone and secured by His perfect obedience and substitutionary sacrifice.

PART 4

The Whole World Stands Condemned

The Word of God declares all mankind to be sinners. They are sinners because they have transgressed God's law in attitude, inclination, thought, word and deed. Again, they are sinners because they have consistently fallen short of God's standard; i.e. they have failed to do the good they ought to have done.

Thus, God's Word says:

James 4:17

¹⁷ So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

In addition, all mankind are sinners because they have incurred the guilt, and have inherited the corruption, of original sin.

Summarising these three aspects of sin, we may say that everyone outside of Christ stands condemned on the following counts:

1. A person is condemned because the guilt of Adam's sin has been imputed to him, and because he has inherited Adam's depraved and sinful nature (*original sin*).
2. A person is condemned because he personally has incurred guilt by having broken God's law (*actual sin*).
3. A person is condemned because he has come short of God's standard of perfect righteousness (*actual sin*).

Unless this sentence of condemnation can be reversed, and they can be justified, every person in the world must pay the full penalty which God's law demands for their sin. The penalty for sin is death: spiritual death, physical death, and eternal death. Eternal death means everlasting conscious suffering in the torments of hell. We must remember that death does not mean cessation of life. The body will pass into a state of death—temporarily. The soul, however, being immortal and spiritual, cannot cease to live. Primarily, therefore, death means separation or alienation from God—not the end of life, or the cessation of existence. ⁵

Outside of Christ, all mankind is presently under a sentence of condemnation. If they remain impenitent to the end, God will punish them with everlasting destruction. To this end, God's Word says:

Romans 3:19

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

⁵ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: The Fall of Man*.

Romans 3:23

²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (See vv. 20-26)

Romans 6:23

²³For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (See vv.15-22)

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9

⁷and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, (See vv.6-10)

Revelation 20:12

¹²And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

Revelation 20:15

¹⁵And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (See vv.11-14)

Revelation 21:8

⁸But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.” (See vv.6-7)

Everyone, then, is under the just sentence of condemnation. If they remain impenitent and unbelieving, they will surely perish. How, though, can a condemned sinner escape from such a just, but dreadful, sentence? How can a condemned person become a justified person?

Summary below

Part 4 Summary

BTE10 Summary — Justification (ESV Edition)

Part 4: The Whole World Stands Condemned

Definition

Condemnation is God's righteous judgment against sin. Because of original sin, personal sin, and continual failure to meet God's perfect standard, all people outside of Christ stand guilty before God and subject to His just sentence of death. Justification is God's provision whereby condemned sinners may be declared righteous through Christ.

Key Truths

1. **Universal guilt** — all mankind stands condemned before God because all have sinned.
 2. **Original sin** — every person inherits Adam's guilt and a fallen, sinful nature.
 3. **Actual sin** — every person commits personal sins in thought, word, deed, and attitude.
 4. **Failure to meet God's standard** — sin includes not only doing wrong but also failing to do the good God requires.
 5. **The whole world is accountable** — no one can excuse or justify themselves before God's law.
 6. **The penalty of sin is death** — sin results in spiritual death, physical death, and eternal death.
 7. **Death means separation from God** — the deepest consequence of sin is alienation from God's presence and favour.
 8. **Final judgment is certain** — those who remain impenitent and unbelieving will face God's eternal judgment.
 9. **Justification is mankind's only hope** — condemned sinners can escape judgment only by being justified through Christ.
-

Biblical Foundations

1. **James 4:17** — failing to do the good we know is also sin.
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2. **Romans 3:19** — the whole world is accountable to God.
 3. **Romans 3:23** — all have sinned and fall short of God's glory.
 4. **Romans 6:23** — the wages of sin is death.
 5. **2 Thessalonians 1:7-9** — unbelievers face eternal destruction away from the Lord's presence.
 6. **Revelation 20:12** — all will be judged according to their deeds.
 7. **Revelation 20:15** — those not found in the Book of Life are cast into the lake of fire.
 8. **Revelation 21:8** — the unrepentant face the second death.
-

Practical Implications

1. **Recognize personal guilt** — every person must acknowledge their need for God's mercy.
 2. **Reject self-righteousness** — no one can escape condemnation through their own goodness or efforts.
 3. **Take God's judgment seriously** — Scripture warns of the certainty and severity of final judgment.
 4. **See the necessity of Christ** — only Christ can deliver sinners from condemnation.
 5. **Value the gospel** — justification becomes precious when we understand our true condition before God.
 6. **Respond with repentance and faith** — the only escape from condemnation is through trusting in Christ.
 7. **Proclaim the gospel urgently** — all people need to hear God's provision of salvation through Jesus Christ.
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Summary Sentence

Because all people are guilty through original sin, personal sin, and failure to meet God's perfect standard, the whole world stands condemned before God and can be delivered only through the justifying grace found in Jesus Christ.

PART 5

The Law Cannot Justify

As we have shown above, justification is a legal or forensic term. When God justifies a person (by declaring him *not guilty*), he is thereby pronouncing that person righteous or blameless in the eyes of his holy law. The justified sinner is therefore free from any sentence of condemnation.

The law either condemns a person, or it justifies him—but it cannot do both at the same time. A person must be either guilty or not guilty of a particular crime. He cannot be both. A person found and declared *guilty* is a legally condemned person. A person found and declared *not guilty* is a legally acquitted or justified person.

God has declared everyone in the whole world to be '*guilty*' of breaking his Law and committing sin. For their sin and guilt, God has condemned all mankind. From this it follows that they cannot now be declared '*not guilty*' and be acquitted or justified. The law has rightly found them guilty of the charges against them, and has condemned them. On the basis and testimony of God's Word, these charges have been proved beyond all doubt. Therefore, that law cannot subsequently find the accused *not guilty* and acquit or justify them. They have been found guilty, and the penalty demanded by the law must be paid in full. A sinner's justification or acquittal, therefore, cannot come by means of God's holy law; for, by means of that same law, fallen and sinful mankind stands justifiably condemned to death.

Good Deeds Cannot Justify

A person's sincere attempts at obedience to the law's demands, or his performance of good deeds, can never justify that person, or secure his acquittal from God's righteous sentence of condemnation. By the standards of his most holy, just and righteous law, God has found everyone guilty. Now, because of their sin, everyone stands condemned. No-one, therefore, will find justification or acquittal from the sentence of condemnation and death by practising good works, or by performing deeds of righteousness. Again, a sinner cannot justify himself before God by works of charity, or by works of penance, or by faithful attendance upon religious duties, rites, or ceremonies.

All these things are ways of seeking to *merit* God's favour. To a greater or lesser extent, they depend upon what man can do to *make himself* acceptable to God. However, a condemned sinner is in no position to do anything to make himself acceptable to God. By his sin, he has already proved to be totally unacceptable to God. A sinner is wholly indisposed to any good work. He is an enemy of God on account of his wicked works (or evil behaviour [NIV]). Therefore, a sinner is utterly unable to earn, or to contribute toward, his salvation.

If a condemned sinner is to experience justification, he must be justified apart from anything he himself is able to do. This is because his sin thoroughly corrupts or pollutes everything that he does by way of good works, or acts of righteousness.

Thus, the Scripture says:

Isaiah 64:6

⁶ We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. [KJV, *filthy rags*]
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. (See v.7)

Colossians 1:21-22

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,
²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to
present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, (See vv.20-
23; cf. Eph. 2:1-3)

This means that those people who make great sacrifices in the cause of their religion; or who give their whole lives to helping others, cannot be justified before God *by means of those righteous acts*. If God has not already saved them by his sovereign and unmerited grace, all their works of love and charity are of no avail to the saving of their soul. Such works, however, are commendable before God, and worthy of great reward in heaven, when—and *only when*—they come from a heart and life that has been regenerated and justified by God's grace. Such a life is also being daily sanctified by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Justification for Perfect Obedience

We have said that all people are sinners, and therefore all without exception stand condemned before a just and holy God. We have said also that when the law has rightly condemned a sinner, it cannot then justify or acquit him. However, if a person were not a sinner, a different situation would prevail.

Let us imagine a person to whom the guilt of Adam's sin had not been imputed. Let us suppose that this imaginary person did not possess a corrupt and sinful nature inherited from Adam. Let us suppose, too, that this person was able to obey God's law perfectly in every detail throughout his entire life. If such a person could ever be found, then indeed his perfect life would ensure justification by God's law.

Such a person has never lived—with one exception: Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus was, and is, totally without sin. Neither the guilt nor the pollution of Adam's sin was imputed or conveyed to him. He inherited no corrupt sinful nature from Adam. The Lord Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to God, and he fulfilled every demand of God's law to the letter.

As such, the Lord Jesus is perfectly fitted to act as the one and only Mediator between God and man. He alone is eminently qualified to act on behalf of those who have broken God's law, and who stand guilty and condemned in God's sight. The Lord Jesus Christ was and is perfectly holy and sinless. He—the eternal Son of God—was therefore the only person fully qualified to make a vicarious (substitutionary) sacrifice of atonement for the sins of all his people.

Thus, it is written in the Word of God:

Hebrews 4:15

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. (See vv.14-15)

Hebrews 7:26-27

²⁶ For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. (See vv.19-25; see esp. v.25)

1 John 2:2

² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (See v.1)

Justification is Not Pardon Alone

Justification is much more than pardon or forgiveness alone. Pardon is the right of a sovereign to remit a penalty. With pardon, forgiveness is granted—but no satisfaction is made regarding justice. The claims of justice remain outstanding. A *pardoned* person is not therefore a *justified* person.

To justify a person, full satisfaction must be made for every offence committed, and for every defect in keeping God's law. This is what God did when he sent forth his own Son as a satisfaction ('propitiation') for sin on behalf of the sinner.

Christ fulfilled all the requirements of God's holy law, and of his justice. He obeyed and fulfilled perfectly the law of God on the sinner's behalf. He made full atonement for sin, thereby satisfying the demands of justice. He propitiated the sinner's guilt, thereby securing the sinner's pardon or forgiveness.

Acting as Judge, therefore, God is able to pardon the believing sinner. Along with this, however, God is able to pronounce the believing sinner righteous (with the righteousness of his own Son). It is these two aspects taken together which constitutes justification.

Unlike pardon (the gratuitous remission of a penalty), justification includes these two elements:

1. *Forgiveness* of sin, including remission of the death penalty.
2. *Imputation* of the perfect righteousness of Christ to the justified sinner's account.

Summary below

Part 5 Summary

BTE10 Summary — Justification (ESV Edition)

Part 5: The Law Cannot Justify

Definition

Justification cannot be obtained through God's law, human obedience, or good works.

God's law rightly condemns all sinners because all have broken it. Therefore, justification must come from outside the sinner through the perfect obedience, atoning sacrifice, and righteousness of Jesus Christ. Justification includes both **forgiveness of sins** and the **imputation of Christ's righteousness**.

Key Truths

1. **The law condemns sinners** — God's law has already declared all mankind guilty because of sin.
 2. **The law cannot both condemn and justify** — once guilt has been established, the law cannot acquit the offender apart from full satisfaction of justice.
 3. **Good works cannot justify** — no amount of morality, charity, religious devotion, or sincere effort can remove guilt before God.
 4. **Human righteousness is corrupted by sin** — even mankind's best efforts fall short of God's perfect standard.
 5. **Justification must come from outside ourselves** — sinners cannot save themselves or contribute to their own justification.
 6. **Perfect obedience would justify** — if a person could keep God's law perfectly, that person would be justified by the law.
 7. **Christ alone fulfilled the law perfectly** — Jesus is the only sinless person who perfectly obeyed God's law and qualified to be humanity's Mediator.
 8. **Christ is the perfect substitute** — through His obedience, sacrifice, and atonement, He satisfied God's justice on behalf of sinners.
 9. **Justification is more than pardon** — pardon removes punishment, but justification includes both forgiveness and a positive declaration of righteousness.
 10. **Christ's righteousness is credited to believers** — God forgives sinners and counts them righteous because of Christ's finished work.
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Biblical Foundations

1. **Isaiah 64:6** — human righteousness is like polluted garments before God.
 2. **Colossians 1:21-22** — sinners are reconciled to God through Christ's death.
 3. **Hebrews 4:15** — Christ was tempted in every respect, yet without sin.
 4. **Hebrews 7:26-27** — Christ is the holy and perfect High Priest who offered Himself once for all.
 5. **1 John 2:2** — Christ is the propitiation for sins.
 6. **Romans 3:20** — no one is justified by works of the law.
 7. **Galatians 3:10-14** — the law cannot justify sinners and Christ redeemed us from its curse.
 8. **Romans 5:6-11** — Christ died for sinners and reconciled them to God.
 9. **1 Peter 2:24** — Christ bore our sins in His body on the tree.
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Practical Implications

1. **Abandon self-righteousness** — salvation cannot be earned through good works or religious performance.
 2. **Trust Christ alone** — believers rest entirely upon Christ's obedience and sacrifice.
 3. **Understand the seriousness of sin** — guilt before God cannot be removed by human effort.
 4. **Rejoice in God's grace** — justification is a gift that sinners could never obtain for themselves.
 5. **Enjoy full forgiveness** — Christ's atonement completely satisfies God's justice.
 6. **Approach God with confidence** — believers stand accepted because of Christ's righteousness, not their own.
 7. **Respond with gratitude and obedience** — good works become the fruit of salvation, not its cause.
 8. **Find assurance in Christ's finished work** — justification rests on what Christ has accomplished, not on human achievement.
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 Summary Sentence

Because God's law has condemned all sinners, neither obedience nor good works can justify them; only the perfect obedience, substitutionary sacrifice, and imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ can secure full forgiveness and justification before God.

PART 6

Justification through Faith

If sinful people are to be justified in the sight of God, then their justification cannot possibly come by the law. For, by the law, everyone stands condemned. Thus, the Scripture says:

Romans 3:9-20

⁹ What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written:

“None is righteous, no, not one;

¹¹ no one understands;

no one seeks for God.

¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;

no one does good,

not even one.” {*Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Eccles. 7:20*}.

¹³ “Their throat is an open grave;

they use their tongues to deceive.” {*Psalms 5:9*};

“The venom of asps is under their lips.” {*Psalms 140:3*}:

¹⁴ “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” {*Psalms 10:7*}:

¹⁵ “Their feet are swift to shed blood;

¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery,

¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known.” {*Prov. 1:16; Isaiah 59:7,8*}:

¹⁸ “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” {*Psalms 36:1*}.

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. (See vv.1-8)

Again, the Scripture says:

Romans 3:21-23

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

A condemned sinner cannot merit justification by good works, nor by works of the law, nor by any other kind of works (or deeds). A sinner's justification must come by grace. This grace represents the unmerited and undeserved love and mercy of God that he bestows upon whom he chooses as a free and sovereign gift.

No-one deserves God's grace (otherwise, grace would cease to be grace). Rather, everyone without exception deserves the due penalty of their sin—which is death and eternal hell. Yet, although justly deserving only condemnation, God shows his great love for the sinner in that he redeems him from the curse and penalty of the law, through faith in Christ. In his great mercy, God justifies the ungodly, and delivers him from the just recompense of his sin.

Thus, the Scripture says:

Romans 3:24

²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

This is the essence of the Gospel. The Gospel is the Good News that God, in his grace, is willing to forgive sinful men and women through faith in Christ. The Gospel proclaims that those whom God's law presently condemns; who are abiding under God's wrath, and who are in danger of perishing eternally, can be justified through faith.

No Justification without Atonement

The Day of Atonement

Under the old covenant, Aaron entered the most holy place with the blood of the sin offerings, to make atonement for his own sins and for the sins of the people. Once within the holy of holies, Aaron then sprinkled the blood on and before the mercy seat (or atonement cover). Once every year, on the Day of Atonement [*Yom Kippur*], the high priest repeated this solemn and sacred ceremony.

Thus, God's Word says:

Leviticus 16:5

⁵ And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering. (See vv.1-4)

Leviticus 16:6-10

⁶ "Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. ⁷ Then he shall take the two goats and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting. ⁸ And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel. ⁹ And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD and use it as a sin offering, ¹⁰ but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel. (See vv.11-14)

⁶ [Leviticus 16:8](#) The meaning of *Azazel* is uncertain; possibly the name of a place or a demon, traditionally a scapegoat; also verses [10](#), [26](#) (ESV footnote)

Leviticus 16:15-16

¹⁵ “Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. ¹⁶ Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses. (See vv.18-19)

Leviticus 16:20-22

²⁰ “And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. ²¹ And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. ²² The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness. (See vv.23-34)

Leviticus 17:11

¹¹ For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life. (See vv.10-14; see esp. v.14)

The Atoning Blood of Christ

Matthew 26:27-28

²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (See vv.26-30; cf. Mark 14:23-24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; cf. also Ex. 24:6-8)

John 1:29

²⁹ The next day he [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming towards him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (See vv.30-35)

1 Peter 1:18-19

¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold,

¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. (See vv.17-21)

Hebrews 9:11-14

¹¹ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (See vv.6-22)

Hebrews 9:24-25

²⁴ For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. ²⁵ Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, (See vv.26-28; see esp. v.28; see also Heb. 10:1-18)

Forgiveness and Justification Require an Atoning Sacrifice

Justification requires that full satisfaction be made in regard to justice. The law of God must be fulfilled perfectly. Every sin must be atoned for, and the penalty of sin—which is death—must be paid. For without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin (Heb. 9:22).

The blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin (Heb. 10:4). In his grace and mercy, however, God provided his one and only Son for our redemption. Jesus, the Lamb of God, assumed our nature (apart from sin), took our place, and obeyed and suffered in our stead (vicarious atonement). By means of his vicarious or substitutionary sufferings and death, Christ wrought out for us a perfect and infinitely meritorious righteousness. Only by the sacrifice of atonement can a sinner be justified, and only by that sacrifice can he be reconciled to God.

Concerning Christ's atoning sacrifice for the sins of his people, the Scripture says:

Romans 3:25

²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

The obedience and sacrifice of his Son on behalf of sinners, has fully satisfied God's justice. Therefore, God is able to accept every repentant sinner who has faith in the substitutionary and atoning death of Christ.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus spoke of a tax collector who, in humility and repentance, cried out, “*God be merciful to me, a sinner*”. The Lord added that this man, rather than the self-righteous Pharisee, went home justified. Similarly, today, God will justify everyone who cries out to him from the heart, and who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. (Luke 18:13-14; Rom. 10:9-10,13)

God is Just in Justifying the Ungodly

God Justifies Those Who have Faith in Jesus

On the grounds of Christ’s perfect righteousness and work of redemption, God can now be just in justifying the ungodly. To this end, the Scripture says:

Romans 3:25-26

²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ 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. (Cf. Rom. 5:6-11)

God is just, because—when he justifies a sinner whom his law has condemned—he is not by-passing or overlooking the righteous demands of his holy law, or of his justice. When Christ suffered and died for our sin, he fully met every demand of God's law for us, making complete satisfaction to God's justice. The sinner whom God has justified has been completely absolved of all charges against him. This is because the Son of God met the law’s demands and died as the guilty sinner’s substitute; i.e. vicariously.

Christ obeyed and suffered on the sinner’s behalf. Therefore, the sinner’s debt of sin and guilt has already been paid. Thus, when God declares him *not guilty*, the believing and forgiven sinner finds real release from the sentence of condemnation. In other words, God has acquitted the believing sinner of all charges against him. If acquitted by God, then God has justified him.

However, as we have already stated, justification consists not only in the forgiveness of sin, but also in the imputation of righteousness. In addition to being forgiven, the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed or credited to the believing sinner’s account

There is, therefore, a twofold reason why God can be seen to be just when he justifies those who believe in Jesus:

1. Because God has forgiven the sinner. The Son of God has fully satisfied all the demands of God’s just and holy law, and has paid the penalty for sin—on the sinner’s behalf.
2. Because God has declared the sinner righteous in his sight. God has imputed the perfect righteousness of his Son to the repentant and believing sinner’s account. It is upon this perfect righteousness that God looks when he looks upon the redeemed sinner.

God, therefore, is completely just and righteous when—by his grace—he justifies the unjust or the ungodly. A perfect Substitute has paid their debt to God's law in full. In addition, God has credited to the believer's account the unblemished righteousness of that Substitute— his one and only Son.

Summary below

Part 6 Summary

BTE10 Summary — Justification (ESV Edition)

Part 6: Justification Through Faith and Atonement

Definition

Justification through faith is God's gracious act of declaring sinners righteous on the basis of Christ's atoning sacrifice and perfect righteousness. Since all people stand condemned by God's law, justification cannot come through works or obedience to the law, but only through faith in Jesus Christ, whose death fully satisfied God's justice and whose righteousness is imputed to believers.

Key Truths

1. **The law condemns all people** — every person stands guilty before God because of sin.
 2. **Justification is by faith, not works** — no sinner can earn justification through law-keeping or good deeds.
 3. **God's righteousness is revealed in the gospel** — salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.
 4. **Justification is a gift of grace** — God justifies undeserving sinners solely because of His mercy and love.
 5. **No justification without atonement** — God's justice requires full satisfaction for sin before forgiveness can be granted.
 6. **Old Testament sacrifices pointed to Christ** — the Day of Atonement foreshadowed Christ's perfect and final sacrifice.
 7. **Christ is the true Lamb of God** — His blood alone secures eternal redemption and forgiveness of sins.
 8. **Christ's sacrifice fully satisfies God's justice** — His substitutionary death paid sin's penalty completely.
 9. **God remains just while justifying sinners** — God does not ignore sin but punishes it fully in Christ.
 10. **Justification includes both forgiveness and righteousness** —
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- Forgiveness of all sin.
 - Imputation of Christ's perfect righteousness.
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Biblical Foundations

1. **Romans 3:19-20** — no one is justified by works of the law.
 2. **Romans 3:21-24** — righteousness comes through faith in Christ and justification is a gift of grace.
 3. **Romans 3:25-26** — Christ's propitiation demonstrates God's justice while justifying believers.
 4. **Leviticus 16:15-22** — the Day of Atonement foreshadowed the removal of sin through sacrifice.
 5. **Leviticus 17:11** — atonement is made through the shedding of blood.
 6. **Matthew 26:27-28** — Christ's blood was poured out for the forgiveness of sins.
 7. **John 1:29** — Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
 8. **1 Peter 1:18-19** — believers are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ.
 9. **Hebrews 9:11-14** — Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary with His own blood and secured eternal redemption.
 10. **Hebrews 9:24-28** — Christ offered Himself once for all as the final sacrifice for sin.
 11. **Luke 18:13-14** — the repentant sinner who seeks God's mercy goes home justified.
 12. **Romans 10:9-13** — all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.
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Practical Implications

1. **Abandon confidence in works** — no human effort can remove guilt before God.
 2. **Trust completely in Christ** — justification rests entirely upon His sacrifice and righteousness.
 3. **Receive salvation as a gift** — justification cannot be earned and must be received by faith.
 4. **Find assurance in God's justice** — believers are truly forgiven because Christ fully paid their debt.
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5. **Rest in Christ's finished work** — no further sacrifice for sin is required.
 6. **Approach God with confidence** — believers stand accepted because of Christ's atonement.
 7. **Respond with humility and gratitude** — salvation magnifies God's grace rather than human achievement.
 8. **Proclaim the gospel boldly** — condemned sinners can be justified through faith in Jesus Christ.
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Summary Sentence

Justification comes by God's grace through faith alone, because Christ's atoning sacrifice fully satisfied God's justice, enabling God to forgive sinners, impute Christ's righteousness to them, and declare them righteous in His sight.

PART 7

Imputed Righteousness

To impute means to reckon or credit to one's account. It means to take what pertains to one person, and attribute it or apply it to another, as if it were actually, inherently and personally his or her own.

When we speak of imputed righteousness, we are speaking of the perfect righteousness of Christ that God reckons or credits to the believing sinner's account. This means that God grants this righteousness to the believer's account, and then considers it as if it were personally and actually the believer's own righteousness.

Justification involves the imputation of Christ's perfect righteousness to our account. It also involves the imputation of our sin and guilt to Christ's account. In saying this, however, we must emphasise that Christ was in no way defiled or contaminated by the corrupting effects of our sin. Our sin—i.e. the *legal liability and penalty* due to our sin—was charged to his account. He bore that sin—or rather, the guilt and liability of that sin—in his own body on the tree; and he paid the penalty for our sin in full. Although God reckoned our sin to his Son's account, the Lord Jesus did not at any time contract the moral pollution of our sin in his own person. On the contrary, though he became a sin offering, he remained the spotless, sinless, and holy Lamb of God.

The Believer's Sin and Christ's Righteousness

Concerning the imputation of our sin to Christ, the Scripture says:

Isaiah 53:6

⁶ 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.

In saying that the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all, this does not mean that the Lord Jesus contracted our sin in his own person. Rather, it means that he *bore the punishment* due to our sin—in his own person.

Again, concerning the imputation of our sin to Christ's account, and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to our account, the Scripture says:

Isaiah 53:11

¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.

2 Corinthians 5:21

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

By thus imputing our sin to Christ's account, and by imputing Christ's righteousness to our account, God justifies us. Now, when God looks upon us, he does not look upon any uprightness of character that we might possess—for our uprightness or inherent righteousness falls immeasurably far short of God's standard of perfection. Again, our old sinful nature contaminates and pollutes any semblance of inherent righteousness or moral rectitude in us. For these reasons alone, our inherent righteousness could never commend us to God. However, when God looks upon us, he looks upon—and sees in us—the imputed righteousness of Christ. God considers the perfect righteousness of his one and only Son to be our righteousness.

Thus, the Scripture says:

1 Corinthians 1:30-31

³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." {*Jer. 9:24*}. (See 1 Cor. 1:26-29).

Christ our Lord is Christ our righteousness. Therefore is God's Word fulfilled which says:

Jeremiah 23:6

⁶ In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

Imputation of Sin and Righteousness

Summary

We may summarise the imputation of sin to Christ, and of righteousness to the believer, as follows:

1. The believer's sin—past, present, and future—has been imputed to Christ's account. By his complete obedience to God's law, and by his sacrifice of atonement on our behalf, Christ has paid in full the penalty for all our sin.
2. God has imputed the perfect righteousness of his Son to the believer's account. The righteousness which God now sees in us is not our own, but Christ's perfect righteousness which—by grace—has been credited to us. Since we now stand before God clothed with the righteousness of his Son, God now considers us as though we ourselves were perfectly righteous.
3. God has imputed our sin to Christ's account. He has also imputed Christ's righteousness to our account. Therefore, since God has made full satisfaction to the demands of his justice and righteousness, he willingly justifies us or pronounces us forever righteous in his sight. Consequently, we can never lose our salvation.

To Justify is to Declare Righteous

As has already been shown, to justify is to declare or pronounce a person to be just or righteous. It is not, however, to infuse holiness or righteousness into him, thereby making the justified sinner inherently holy or righteous (the doctrine of subjective justification).

When God justifies a sinner, he *declares* that person to be righteous—but he does not *make* him inherently righteous. The redeemed sinner has not become inwardly righteous. However, by the grace of God in redemption, the believing sinner is credited with the perfect righteousness of Christ. In virtue of this righteousness and redemption, God has justified the sinner. He can stand, therefore, in the presence of God *as though* he had never sinned. Thus, with the apostle Paul, the believer is able to say:

Philippians 3:7-9

⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— (See vv.1-11)

To Justify is Not to Make Righteous

To justify is to *declare* righteous. It is not to *make* righteous

Justification is a forensic or legal term. A person pronounced *not guilty* is acquitted and justified in the eyes of the law. This verdict, however, does not somehow effect a change in that person's character. The pronouncement of the *not guilty* verdict does not infuse moral goodness into the person, thus making him a holy or a righteous person. As far as the *not guilty* verdict is concerned, he remains the same person inwardly that he was before. The verdict has simply been a public declaration that the demands of justice have been fully met and satisfied; and that this person, therefore, now stands acquitted of all charges against him.

So it is with the justified believer. In the eyes of God's law, he has been declared *not guilty*. This verdict, however, has not changed his moral character. Although God has acquitted him, the justified believer is still inherently unrighteous. Although, however, he remains inherently unrighteous, the justified believer can stand confidently in the presence of God. This is because God has effectively clothed the believer with the perfect righteousness of Christ. God, therefore, has justified the believer because of Christ's perfect life, his substitutionary and atoning death, and his triumphant resurrection.

Justification, therefore, declares a person to be righteous in the eyes of the law—in this case, God's law. Justification, however, does not make that person inherently righteous. The believer is being made inwardly righteous—by degrees—through the progressive work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification (imparted righteousness).

No Perfection in This Life

The idea that one can attain to moral perfection in this life is erroneous doctrine. It is not the teaching of the Bible, nor has it been the experience of any of God's redeemed people while they lived on this earth. One can only be considered perfect when he is free from every sinful thought, word, action, attitude, disposition or inclination of the mind. Another characteristic of perfection is being totally concerned with righteous living, acting, thinking and doing. This will happen only when the old sinful nature (the 'flesh') has finally been eradicated; i.e. when the believer is presented faultless and blameless before the throne of God with rejoicing.

Meanwhile, the believer is being sanctified. His inward life is being changed from one degree of glory to another. Sanctification is an ongoing, life-long process. When the believer is taken into the presence of the Lord, then—and then only—will his sanctification be completed, and his glorification be fully realised.

Concerning these things, God's Word says:

2 Corinthians 3:18

¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (See vv.7-17; cf. Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49; Col. 3:10; cf. esp. 2 Cor. 4:16)

Philippians 3:20-21

²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. (See vv.17-19; cf. 1 Cor. 15:43,48-49; Col. 3:4)

1 John 3:2

² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. (See vv.1,3; cf. Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:16-17)

Jude 24-25

²⁴ Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen. (See vv.17-23; cf. Eph. 5:27; Col. 1:22)

Justification, therefore, acquits the believer of guilt, and declares him to be righteous. However, it does not infuse righteousness into him, nor does it make him perfect, nor does it enable him to become perfect in this life (although, this must be his aim). Although the believer is daily being renewed after the image of Christ, he is still capable of falling into sin. Throughout his life, then, the

believer's old sinful nature will remain present and active. Of course, by God's grace, we must constantly subdue the old nature, and we must never permit it to regain a controlling influence over our lives.

Summary below

Part 7 Summary

BTE10 Summary — Justification (ESV Edition)

Part 7: Imputed Righteousness

Definition

Imputed righteousness is the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ that God **credits to the believer's account** through faith. At the same time, God imputes the believer's sin and guilt to Christ, who bears its penalty through His substitutionary death. On this basis, God declares the believer righteous in His sight. Justification is therefore a legal declaration, not an inward transformation of character.

Key Truths

1. **Imputation means crediting or reckoning** — God credits Christ's righteousness to the believer's account.
 2. **A great exchange occurs** — the believer's sin is imputed to Christ, and Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer.
 3. **Christ remained sinless** — although He bore our guilt and punishment, He was never morally corrupted by sin.
 4. **God sees believers clothed in Christ's righteousness** — acceptance with God rests entirely upon Christ's perfect righteousness.
 5. **Justification declares righteousness** — God pronounces the believer righteous before His law.
 6. **Justification does not make a person inherently righteous** — inward transformation belongs to sanctification, not justification.
 7. **Salvation is secure** — because Christ fully paid the penalty of sin and His righteousness is credited to believers, justification cannot be reversed.
 8. **Human righteousness cannot justify** — inherent righteousness is insufficient before God's perfect standard.
 9. **Christ is our righteousness** — believers stand before God solely on the basis of Christ's righteousness.
 10. **Perfection awaits glorification** — believers are progressively sanctified now, but complete holiness will not be attained until they are glorified.
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Biblical Foundations

1. **Isaiah 53:6** — the Lord laid our iniquities upon Christ.
 2. **Isaiah 53:11** — Christ bears iniquities and makes many accounted righteous.
 3. **2 Corinthians 5:21** — Christ became sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
 4. **1 Corinthians 1:30-31** — Christ became our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.
 5. **Jeremiah 23:6** — "The Lord is our righteousness."
 6. **Philippians 3:7-9** — believers possess a righteousness from God through faith in Christ.
 7. **2 Corinthians 3:18** — believers are progressively transformed by the Spirit.
 8. **Philippians 3:20-21** — Christ will transform believers into His likeness.
 9. **1 John 3:2** — believers will be like Christ when He appears.
 10. **Jude 24-25** — God will present believers blameless before His glory.
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Practical Implications

1. **Rest in Christ's righteousness** — acceptance before God depends on Christ, not personal merit.
 2. **Enjoy assurance of salvation** — God has fully dealt with sin through Christ's atoning work.
 3. **Reject self-righteousness** — no amount of personal goodness can contribute to justification.
 4. **Pursue holiness humbly** — believers strive for holiness knowing that sanctification follows justification.
 5. **Live with confidence before God** — believers may approach God clothed in Christ's righteousness.
 6. **Understand the difference between justification and sanctification** — one changes our legal standing; the other changes our character.
 7. **Look forward to glorification** — complete freedom from sin will be realized only in God's presence.
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8. **Give all glory to Christ** — salvation rests entirely upon His obedience, sacrifice, and righteousness.
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 Summary Sentence

Imputed righteousness is God's gracious act of crediting Christ's perfect righteousness to believers and charging their sin to Christ, enabling God to justify them fully while preserving His perfect justice, until their sanctification is completed in glorification.

PART 8

No Justification Without Sanctification

It is a great mistake to believe that, after God justifies a person, that person can continue to gratify the desires of his sinful nature. Such a belief or attitude is contrary to the clear teaching of the Bible. The Bible constantly asserts or implies that everyone whom God has justified is also being sanctified by his Holy Spirit. (Rom. 6:1-23)

Since the Holy Spirit is sanctifying us, we must consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God. We are dead to unrighteousness and alive to holiness. We demonstrate growth in grace and holiness by showing increasing godliness in our character and conduct. We are being continually renewed after the likeness of Christ, as the Spirit of holiness effects his cleansing and sanctifying work within us (imparted righteousness).

Concerning this, the Scripture says:

Romans 6:15-18

¹⁵ What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. (See vv.1-14)

The apostle Paul continues:

Romans 6:19-23

¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. ²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:19b

^{19b} ...For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.⁷

We should observe that—in the verse quoted above—the term ‘members’ refers not only to the members or parts of the body, but also to the faculties of the mind. We are to yield the parts of our body and our soul—including our mind—as servants of righteousness that leads to holiness. Our whole being—with all its parts and faculties—is the temple of the living God: and the temple of God is holy.

To this end, God's Word says:

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

¹⁶ Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (See vv.9-17)

2 Corinthians 6:14-16

¹⁴ Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵ What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

“I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.

{Exod. 29:45; Lev. 26:12; Jer. 32:38; Ezek. 37:27}

2 Corinthians 6:17-18

¹⁷ Therefore go out from their midst,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,

⁷ sanctification: Romans 6:19; Greek, ἁγιασμός **hagiasmos**, *holiness*. (the fruit of sanctification)

and touch no unclean thing;
then I will welcome you, {*Isaiah 52:11; Ezek. 20:34,41*}

¹⁸and I will be a father to you,
and you shall be sons and daughters to me,
says the Lord Almighty.” {*2 Sam. 7:14; 7:8; Jer. 31:1,9*}

2 Corinthians 7:1

¹ Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (Cf. 1 Thess. 4:7; 1 Pet. 1:15-16)

A Man Reaps What He Sows

By his providence, God judges—in this life—those believers who persist in disregarding the sanctity of their bodies. The Scripture warns:

Galatians 6:7

⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

A man reaps only what he sows. He who continues to nourish the desires of the sinful nature (the ‘flesh’) will eventually find himself overcome and ruined, or destroyed, by that nature. This is God’s punishment or discipline upon the believer who persistently and wilfully disregards God’s Word. Thus, that Word says:

Galatians 6:8a

^{8a} For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption... (Cf. Hosea 8:7; 10:12-13)

Short-term carnal satisfaction can result in long term corruption of our nature.

On the other hand, he who continues to nourish the desires of the Spirit of holiness, will certainly mature in holiness of life, and will reap the outcome—which is life eternal. Thus, the Scripture continues:

Galatians 6:8b

^{8b} ...but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

A truly regenerated child of God cannot lose his salvation. However, if he wilfully persists in gratifying the evil desires of his sinful nature, God will certainly discipline him. Thus, it is possible for a believer to bring upon himself illness or disease.

Concerning this, God's Word says:

Psalms 107:17-20

¹⁷ Some were fools through their sinful ways,
and because of their iniquities suffered affliction;
¹⁸ they loathed any kind of food,
and they drew near to the gates of death.
¹⁹ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress.
²⁰ He sent out his word and healed them,
and delivered them from their destruction.
(See vv.21-22)

Psalms 119:67

⁶⁷ Before I was afflicted I went astray,
but now I keep your word.

Psalms 119:71

⁷¹ It is good for me that I was afflicted,
that I might learn your statutes.

In the first century church, some believers had fallen asleep (died) because they had disregarded the holy nature of their election and calling, and had despised the discipline of the Lord. No-one, however, can mock or despise the all-holy God. Eventually, God had applied the ultimate temporal punishment to these believers. He had withdrawn their lives—in order to preserve their souls.

Thus, God's Word says:

1 Corinthians 11:26-32

²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.⁸ ³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. (See vv.17-25,33-34; cf. v.32 with Ps. 94:12-14; Heb. 12:5-11)

⁸ died: [1 Corinthians 11:30](#) Greek *have fallen asleep* (as in [15:6](#), [20](#)) (ESV footnote)

It is a fearful thing to profess faith in Christ, and yet to despise his Holy Spirit by yielding our bodies to the corrupt desires of the sinful nature.⁹

Summary below

⁹ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Sanctification; Providence*.

Part 8 Summary

BTE10 Summary — Justification (ESV Edition)

Part 8: No Justification Without Sanctification

Definition

Sanctification is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit whereby those who have been justified are progressively made holy in character and conduct. While justification declares a sinner righteous before God, sanctification transforms the believer's life. Everyone whom God justifies, He also sanctifies.

Key Truths

1. **Justification and sanctification are inseparable** — no person can be truly justified without also being sanctified by the Holy Spirit.
 2. **Grace does not encourage sin** — believers are not free to continue living in sin simply because they are justified by grace.
 3. **Believers are slaves of righteousness** — those set free from sin are called to pursue holiness and obedience.
 4. **Sanctification affects the whole person** — body, mind, heart, and conduct are to be devoted to God.
 5. **The believer is God's temple** — the Holy Spirit dwells within believers, making holiness a necessary aspect of Christian living.
 6. **Holiness requires separation from sin** — believers are called to reject lawlessness and pursue purity.
 7. **A person reaps what he sows** — sowing to the flesh brings corruption, while sowing to the Spirit produces spiritual maturity and eternal reward.
 8. **God disciplines His children** — persistent disobedience invites God's loving but sometimes severe discipline.
 9. **Believers cannot lose their salvation** — genuine believers remain secure in Christ, though they may experience divine chastening.
 10. **Sanctification proves regeneration and justification** — growth in holiness demonstrates the reality of God's saving work.
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■ Biblical Foundations

1. **Romans 6:15-18** — believers have been freed from sin and become slaves of righteousness.
 2. **Romans 6:19-23** — righteousness leads to sanctification and ultimately eternal life.
 3. **1 Corinthians 3:16-17** — believers are God's temple and must live in holiness.
 4. **1 Corinthians 6:18-20** — believers were bought with a price and must glorify God with their bodies.
 5. **2 Corinthians 6:14-18** — God's people are called to separate from spiritual uncleanness.
 6. **2 Corinthians 7:1** — believers are to pursue holiness in the fear of God.
 7. **Galatians 6:7-8** — whatever a person sows, that he will also reap.
 8. **Psalms 107:17-20** — God disciplines and restores those afflicted because of sinful ways.
 9. **Psalms 119:67** — affliction can lead believers back to obedience.
 10. **Psalms 119:71** — God's discipline teaches His people His statutes.
 11. **1 Corinthians 11:26-32** — some believers experienced sickness and death as divine discipline.
 12. **Hebrews 12:5-11** — the Lord disciplines those whom He loves.
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■ Practical Implications

1. **Pursue holiness daily** — believers should actively seek growth in godliness and obedience.
 2. **Guard both body and mind** — every faculty is to be devoted to God's service.
 3. **Resist the desires of the flesh** — sin must not be allowed to dominate the Christian life.
 4. **Yield to the Holy Spirit** — spiritual growth comes through cooperation with the Spirit's sanctifying work.
 5. **Take God's discipline seriously** — disobedience brings consequences even for genuine believers.
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6. **Live as God's temple** — believers should honour God with their thoughts, actions, and relationships.
 7. **Sow to the Spirit** — choices made today affect spiritual growth and maturity.
 8. **Find comfort in God's fatherly care** — divine discipline is evidence of God's love, not rejection.
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 Summary Sentence

Everyone whom God justifies He also sanctifies; therefore genuine believers do not continue comfortably in sin but are progressively transformed by the Holy Spirit into lives of holiness, obedience, and increasing conformity to Christ.

PART 9

Justification By Faith and Works (1)

Does James Contradict Paul?

Sometimes, people suppose that a contradiction exists between the teaching of the apostle Paul, and that of James regarding the method of justification. Paul, they say, asserts that God justifies a person by his faith, apart from works of the law. James, however, they say, insists that God justifies a person by his works, besides faith.

There is, of course, no contradiction between the two. When James speaks of justification, he refers to an entirely different aspect of justification from that discussed by Paul. These two distinct—but related—aspects of justification may be outlined as follows:

1. The *initial act* of justification, or justification by faith alone in Christ alone.
The initial act of justification whereby God declares a repentant and believing sinner to be righteous, is effected—immediately and instantaneously—at regeneration or the new birth. It is this aspect of justification with which Paul deals primarily (although not exclusively).
2. The *subsequent evidence* of justification, or the living proof of justification (and of regeneration), is demonstrated by a believer's wholehearted obedience to the command and will of God. The subsequent evidence of justification is associated with sanctification—which includes faithful, holy and obedient living. It is this aspect of justification with which James deals primarily.

Like Paul, James uses the example of Abraham as an illustration. However, James cites a different period in Abraham's life. These two periods involve entirely distinct issues, and these issues are separated by many years.

Before considering what James says, we will look briefly at what Paul says about justification by faith alone.

The Initial Act of Justification

(Justification by Faith)

The *initial act* of justification occurs at regeneration. This act is entirely an act of God's will, and it is exercised toward the sinner in sovereign grace. By the effectual calling of the Holy Spirit, a sinner is drawn to Christ, regenerated spiritually, and enabled to believe on him. God justifies, or reckons righteous in his sight, everyone who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this regard, Paul says:

Romans 3:20

²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. (See vv.9-19)

The inspired apostle continues:

Romans 3:21-24

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, (See vv.25-27)

Romans 3:27

²⁷ Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. (See vv.29-31)

It is by the sovereign grace and mercy of God alone that he justifies a sinner. A person who is dead in trespasses and sins is in no condition to merit—or to work toward—his justification. God grants it to him as a gift.

By his Holy Spirit in effectual calling, God imparts faith to the sinner to enable him to believe on Christ as his Saviour and Lord. The ability to exercise this kind of faith, however, comes as a gift from God. Without this gift, the sinner would remain incapable of repenting and believing on the Lord Jesus Christ.

By Faith, Abraham was Counted Righteous

To prove that justification is by grace through faith, and not of works, Paul refers to the example of Abraham. God justified Abraham when he believed, and when he embraced the seemingly impossible promise that God would make of his seed a great nation.

In this regard, God's Word says:

Genesis 15:5

⁵ And he [the LORD] brought him outside and said, "Look towards heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." (See vv.1-4; cf. Gen. 12:3)

We must remember that—when this promise was made—Abraham and his wife Sarah (or Sarai) were childless, and well advanced in years. Yet, the Scripture continues:

Genesis 15:6

⁶ And he [Abraham] believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness. (See vv.7-21)

Abraham (or Abram) believed the LORD. Against all hope (humanly speaking), Abraham believed God's word that he would yet become a father, and Sarah a mother. Abraham believed too that his descendants would become as innumerable as the stars in the sky. He also believed that, through the promised Offspring or Seed, God would bless all nations on earth. (Gen. 12:3; 15:5; Gal. 3:8,14,16)

Again, God's Word says:

Romans 4:18-21

¹⁸In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." {Gen. 15:5} ¹⁹He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. (See vv.9-17)

Romans 4:22

²²That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness". (See vv.23-25)

God justified Abraham because the patriarch believed the promise God made to him. By its very nature, works cannot enter into belief in a promise. If works cannot enter, then justification must be by faith—and by faith alone.

We may further emphasise that justification is by faith by referring to Paul's remarks in his letter to the Galatians:

Galatians 2:16

¹⁶yet we know that a person is not justified ¹⁰ by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. (See vv.17-20)

Then the apostle adds:

Galatians 2:21

²¹I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness ¹¹ were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. (Cf. Gal. 3:21)

Therefore, we can see that the *initial act* of justification, whereby God pronounces a believing sinner righteous, is by faith alone. The granting of this faith to the sinner is entirely attributable to the sovereign grace of God. Salvation, therefore, is by grace through faith.

¹⁰ justified: [Galatians 2:16](#) Or counted righteous (three times in verse [16](#)); also verse [17](#) (ESV footnote)

¹¹ righteousness: [Galatians 2:21](#) Or justification. (ESV footnote)

The believer having been justified by faith continues to live by faith at every step of his new Christian experience. However, the believer publicly demonstrates the reality of his faith by his daily conduct. We will now consider this practical outworking of the believer's faith; or, as James terms it, justification by works (besides faith).

Justification By Faith and Works (2)

The Subsequent Evidence of Justification

(Justification by Works)

Justification is by faith and by faith alone. However, the *subsequent evidence* or proof of justification is shown by the believer's manner of life. Following his regeneration and justification, the believer must continue to live a life that demonstrates beyond all question that he is a totally changed person. He must show that the Holy Spirit has renewed—and is continuing to renew—his mind. He must demonstrate also his wholehearted obedience to the will and purposes of God for his life. It is in this regard that James asks concerning Abraham:

James 2:21

²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? (See v.22; cf. Gen. 22:9,12)

James 2:23

²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. (Cf. Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; cf. also 2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8)

Then James adds:

James 2:24

²⁴ You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. (See vv.25-26)

Paul refers to Abraham being justified by faith. God reckoned Abraham righteous through his belief in the LORD's promise that he would make of his seed a great nation; even although, as yet, he remained childless. Abraham also believed that—through the promised Seed or Offspring—God would bless all nations on earth. (Gen. 12:3; 15:4-6; 17:19,21; Gal. 3:18-19,29) This was the *initial act* of justification.

James, on the other hand, refers to Abraham being justified by works (besides faith), when he was about to offer his son Isaac upon the altar. (Gen. 22:1-18) This was the *subsequent evidence* of Abraham's justification.

Again, when God justified Abraham and imputed righteousness to him, this event occurred about 20 years before Isaac had been born. However, when Abraham took his son Isaac to Mount Moriah in obedience to God's command, this event occurred when Isaac had grown to young manhood. This means that there must have been a lengthy intervening period between these two events—perhaps as much as 40 years.

By Works, Abraham was Proved Righteous

Isaac was the son whom God had promised, and the one through whom the promised Seed (Christ) ultimately would descend. Now, God required Abraham to offer up his beloved son in sacrifice. Abraham, however, believed that—if necessary—God would raise his son from the dead (Heb. 11:17-19). Therefore, says James, this practical demonstration of Abraham's faith—a faith that resulted in works of obedience to God's command—was imputed to Abraham for righteousness. Thus, God's Word says:

James 2:22-24

²²You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; ²³and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—{Gen. 15:6}: and he was called a friend of God. ²⁴You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. (See vv.14-25)

James 2:26

²⁶For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. (Cf. v.17)

God, of course, had already counted Abraham righteous by faith; and, by his grace, the LORD had justified the patriarch. This is the initial (and only) act of justification; and the one to which Paul refers. Now, however, at this later stage in his life, Abraham proved the reality of his faith by taking God at his word. In trust and obedience to God, Abraham showed his willingness to offer up his promised and beloved son on the altar of sacrifice—believing that God would still be able to fulfil the promise he had made concerning Abraham's offspring.

Relation of Faith to Works

By his faith, and by faith alone, Abraham was *declared* righteous. By his works—works of obedience to God—Abraham was *proved* righteous. Thus, the Scripture is fulfilled which says:

Habakkuk 2:4

⁴ "Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith. (See vv.1-3; cf. John 3:36; Rom. 1:17)

As sinners, God justifies us solely by his grace, through our faith in his Son. Once justified by faith, however, we must continue to *live* by faith. As with Abraham, we prove the reality of our justification by our subsequent manner of life—including our obedience to God's command and will. Those who obey God wholeheartedly, prove—by their actions—that they have been regenerated and justified. Those who consistently disregard the word and will of God, prove—by their actions—that they have never experienced regeneration and justification.

Justification must result in obedience and holy living (the fruit of sanctification). It must result also in a life that shows loving and practical concern for the needs of others. For, as James rightly says:

James 2:14-17

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled”, without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (See vv.18-22; cf. v.16 with Prov. 3:27-28; 1 John 3:17-18)

Summary below

Part 9 Summary

BTE10 Summary — Justification (ESV Edition)

Part 9: Justification by Faith and Works

Definition

Justification is by faith alone, but true faith is never alone. God justifies the sinner through faith in Christ apart from works, yet the reality of that justification is subsequently demonstrated by a life of obedience, holiness, and good works. Paul emphasizes the **initial act of justification**, while James emphasizes the **evidence of justification**.

Key Truths

1. **Paul and James do not contradict one another** — they address different aspects of justification.
 2. **The initial act of justification is by faith alone** — God declares sinners righteous through faith in Christ apart from works.
 3. **Justification occurs by grace** — faith itself is God's gift, granted through the Holy Spirit's work.
 4. **Works do not cause justification** — no human action contributes to God's declaration of righteousness.
 5. **Abraham was justified by faith** — God counted Abraham righteous when he believed God's promise.
 6. **Works demonstrate genuine faith** — obedience reveals the reality of saving faith already present.
 7. **Abraham's obedience proved his faith** — offering Isaac demonstrated the authenticity of the faith by which he had already been justified.
 8. **Faith and works belong together** — living faith produces obedience and practical godliness.
 9. **Dead faith produces no fruit** — a profession of faith without obedience and love is not saving faith.
 10. **Justification must result in sanctification** — genuine faith leads to holy living and practical concern for others.
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Biblical Foundations

1. **Romans 3:20** — no one is justified by works of the law.
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2. **Romans 3:21-24** — justification comes through faith in Jesus Christ and is a gift of grace.
 3. **Romans 3:27** — boasting is excluded because justification is by faith.
 4. **Genesis 15:6** — Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.
 5. **Romans 4:18-22** — Abraham's faith was counted as righteousness.
 6. **Galatians 2:16** — a person is justified through faith in Christ, not by works of the law.
 7. **Galatians 2:21** — if righteousness could come through the law, Christ died for no purpose.
 8. **James 2:21-24** — Abraham's works demonstrated the reality of his faith.
 9. **James 2:26** — faith without works is dead.
 10. **Habakkuk 2:4** — the righteous shall live by faith.
 11. **James 2:14-17** — genuine faith expresses itself through loving action.
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Practical Implications

1. **Trust Christ alone for justification** — salvation rests on faith in Christ, not personal works.
 2. **Understand the role of works** — works are evidence of salvation, not the cause of it.
 3. **Live out your faith** — true faith produces obedience to God's commands.
 4. **Demonstrate love practically** — genuine faith expresses itself through care for others.
 5. **Reject empty profession** — claiming faith without spiritual fruit provides no assurance of salvation.
 6. **Follow Abraham's example** — trust God's promises and obey His Word.
 7. **Persevere in holy living** — obedience confirms the reality of regeneration and justification.
 8. **Give God all the glory** — justification is entirely of grace from beginning to end.
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Summary Sentence

God justifies sinners by grace through faith alone, but the reality of that justification is proven by a life of obedience, holiness, and good works that flow from genuine saving faith.

Final Summary of entire study follows below

Final Summary

Justification

1. Purpose of the Doctrine

The doctrine of **justification** explains how God declares sinners righteous through faith in Christ alone. It provides the foundation for assurance, peace with God, and confidence in the finished work of Christ.

2. Key Biblical Foundations

Scripture teaches that justification is God's gracious act of declaring the believer righteous on the basis of Christ's obedience and atoning death (Rom. 3:21–26). Believers are justified **by faith apart from works** (Rom. 4:5; Gal. 2:16), receiving Christ's righteousness as a gift (Phil. 3:9). Peace with God flows from this declaration (Rom. 5:1). These passages establish justification as a legal, once-for-all act grounded entirely in Christ.

3. How the Parts Fit Together

The study begins by defining justification as a judicial declaration, not an inward transformation. It then explains humanity's guilt and inability, showing why justification must be by grace alone. Further Parts explore the role of Christ's righteousness — His obedience, death, and resurrection — as the sole basis of justification. The study also clarifies the relationship between faith and works, demonstrating that faith receives Christ while works follow as evidence of new life. The final sections show how justification produces assurance, peace, and confidence before God. Together these Parts form a coherent doctrinal flow: human guilt, Christ's righteousness, faith's reception, and the believer's secure standing.

4. Doctrinal Conclusion

Justification is **God's once-for-all declaration** that the believer is righteous in His sight because of Christ alone. It is grounded in Christ's obedience and blood, received through faith, and entirely apart from human works. This righteousness is imputed, not infused — credited to the believer's account. Because justification rests on Christ's finished work, it is complete, irreversible, and the unshakeable foundation of Christian assurance.

5. Practical Implications

This doctrine gives believers confidence to approach God without fear, knowing their acceptance rests on Christ, not performance. It strengthens assurance, since justification cannot be undone. It fuels worship and gratitude, directing attention to Christ's perfect righteousness. And it shapes discipleship by motivating obedience not to earn favour, but in joyful response to God's gracious declaration.

END

