

Views on Justification

Traditional Reformed (Biblical) View:

Sin, which causes separation from God, is addressed through the atoning work of Christ

"By justification we mean – man's acceptance with God, or his being regarded and treated as righteous in His sight – as the object of His favor, and not of His wrath; of His blessing, and not of His curse." James Buchanan (1867)

Traditional Romish: Jesus redeems the church, making acquittal for the sins of those under the church's authority (only at the final judgment). Our works add to the justification Jesus accomplishes

Traditional Eastern Orthodox: Life-long event begun by God's grace, added to by our "freewill" acts of faith (works)

Antinomians: Jesus justified all, opening a door for a potential universalism

Socinians: Our faith, not Jesus' work, justified

Quakers: Justification rests on the Spirit's work, in us, not in Jesus' work for us.

Arminian: Essentially the Reformed view, but it is done for all mankind, but it is up to us to accept it.

Barthian: Justification is our "conforming to the God has made about us" in Christ – God Justifies by anticipating our faith – covenant is also seen as a "partnership" between God and man (difference between believers and unbelievers is that believers are conscious of it and live it out while unbelievers do not)

Traditional Views focus on the problem of sin and our being reconciled to God

"New Perspective on Paul" focuses on us being made a part of the covenant. God's grace is revealed in bringing people into Christ, but our works preserves our place in the covenant

Norman Shepherd (former professor WTS): faith and works are both instruments of justification, speaks of justification by "the obedience of faith"

Albert Schweitzer: justification is a result of "being in Christ", not about reconciliation from sin.

Krister Stendahl: in "The Introspective Conscience of the West," wrote that justification is not about making us right with God by dealing with our sins, that (he argued) was the guilty conscience of Calvin, Luther, and Augustine being read into the text, but instead Justification is bringing Jew and Gentile together at the table as one people.

E.P. Sanders: "Covenantal Nomism" (see reverse) – God is justifying himself as faithful to his covenant, not justifying us from our sins

N.T. Wright: Gospel is not about reconciling us from sin, but proclaiming that in Christ, Jew and Gentile can be brought together without the "boundary markers" of the Jewish cultic practices. "Who sits at the table together"

Aspects of the Study of Justification

1. The need for justification: The Justice of God
2. The source of justification: God's free grace in the work of Christ due to his Righteousness
3. Legal grounds on which Justification is made (forensic nature of justification): substitutionary atonement (note: justification is not amnesty nor does it make us morally good)
4. Justification demands a "Double Imputation" because of the imputation of Adam's sin (Righteousness of God is imputed to man and the sinfulness of elect man is imputed to Christ).
5. Means of Justification: Through faith apart from the Law
"Justified by faith is he who, excluded from the righteousness of works, grasps the righteousness of Christ through faith, and clothed in it, appears in God's sight not as a sinner but as a righteous man." –Calvin's Institutes 3.11.2
6. Goal of Justification: Good works to the Glory of God
7. Recipients of Justification: the elect

E.P. Sander's Covenantal Nomism

1. God has elected national Israel
2. God has given the Law to national Israel
3. The Law implies God's promise to maintain God's election of national Israel
4. (and) the Law implies the responsibility of the covenant members to obey the Law
5. God rewards obedience to his Law and punishes transgression
6. The Law also provides a means of atonement to reconcile members of the covenant to God in light of their transgressions (the sacrificial system and the rites and rituals of Israel)
7. This sacrificial atonement provides the means of maintaining the covenantal relationship
8. All who are maintained in the covenant by obedience, atonement, and God's mercy belongs to the group who will be redeemed in the end.

N.T. Wright's New Perspective

1. Though Paul studied under Hillel, he was at heart a Pharisee in the Shammaite school and believed worshipping in peace but under pagan dominion was not successful, but Torah demanded Israel to serve God in all aspects
2. God's covenant was with National Israel
3. Israel was called to be a light in a dark world
4. Israel was called to be the people through whom God would undo the effects of sin and the fall of Adam.
5. Yet, much of Israel was in exile from the land and those having returned to the land were still under gentile rule, so likewise were still in exile in a sense
6. The temple described by the prophet Ezekiel had not yet been built
7. The point of life was not to go to heaven or be reconciled with God (they were already "God's people") but instead it was to call Israel back to the Torah and bring about Israel's promised future.
8. Damascus road, for Paul, not a conversion, but the conviction that God had done for Jesus what he was going to do for Israel at the end of time – vindicating Israel
9. Israel's destiny is summed up and achieved by Jesus, ushering in a new age that prepared the world to be remade.
10. Gospel is the announcement to the world that God reigns and has returned to Zion his throne, returning Israel from Exile (spiritually), it is not the message of how one becomes saved, but the announcement that Jesus is King