

# Justification & Regeneration

## “What We Believe”

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### Justification

Notes excerpted from *The Gospel Institute* – learn more at [www.peoriagospelinstitute.org](http://www.peoriagospelinstitute.org).

An instantaneous legal act of God in which he 1) thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ's righteousness as belonging to us, and 2) declares us to be righteous in his sight. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 723.

Justification is the sovereign work of God in which he declares the guilty sinner to be righteous and the rightful demands of the law to be satisfied. Jeffery, *Bitesize Theology*, 69.

“Those whom God effectually calls, he also freely justifies, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing Christ's active obedience unto the whole law, and passive obedience in his death for their whole and sole righteousness by faith, which faith they have not of themselves; it is the gift of God.” – [London Baptist Confession](#), Ch 11 paragraph 1 Of Justification

J.I. Packer: [Sola Fide – The Reformed Doctrine of Justification](http://www.the-highway.com/Justification_Packer.html) ([http://www.the-highway.com/Justification\\_Packer.html](http://www.the-highway.com/Justification_Packer.html))

#### A. Justification includes a legal declaration by God

“... the reason God declares the believer just is that there has been a costly achievement by Jesus Christ, on the basis of which our Lord's saving work, we who are unrighteous in ourselves are declared by him to be righteous. It's not a legal fiction at all. We do possess a righteous standing before God because God has given it to us in grace because of what our representative has done for us. It is a costly achievement by Christ. It is not legal fiction.”

– S. Lewis Johnson, [The Legal, or Forensic Character of Justification](http://sljinstitute.net/the-theology-of-the-reformers/the-legal-or-forensic-character-of-justification/) (<http://sljinstitute.net/the-theology-of-the-reformers/the-legal-or-forensic-character-of-justification/>)

1. God declares the wicked to be righteous on the basis of faith.

**Romans 4:5** *And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness*

2. Justification is the opposite of condemnation. Condemnation is the declaration of the wicked as guilty. We are condemned by God because of our sin.

**John 3:17-20** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. <sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. <sup>20</sup> For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

**Romans 8:1** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

**Romans 8:33** Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

3. The Old Testament uses the term in this way.

**Deuteronomy 25:1** (ASV) If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, and [the judges] judge them; then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked; // **Deuteronomy 25:1** (ESV) "If there is a dispute between men and they come into court and the judges decide between them, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty

It is impossible for judges to make people righteous, but they do declare them so as a legal act.

**Exodus 23:7** Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and righteous, for I will not acquit the wicked. (NET Bible, the NIV, and others read "acquit," but the LXX Greek word is "justify.")

**Proverbs 17:15** (ASV) He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the righteous, Both of them alike are an abomination to Jehovah.

**Isaiah 5:22** (ASV) Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink; 23 that justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!

## **B. God declares us to be righteous in His sight**

1. We are freed from the penalty of our sin through God's full forgiveness

**Romans 8:1** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

**Romans 4:6-8** just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”

The forgiveness of past sin does not solve our problem entirely as we need righteousness to be fit for heaven.

2. We are declared to have the merits of perfect righteousness.

“Because we are united by faith to [Jesus Christ] who is perfectly righteous, God accepts us as perfectly righteous. God does not resort to some kind of legal fiction, calling something righteous that is not. Rather, He declares us righteous on the basis of the real accomplished righteousness of Christ, imputed to us because of our union with Him.” – Jerry Bridges, [\*The Gospel for Real Life\*](#)

**Isaiah 61:10** I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

**Romans 3:21-22** But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction

**Romans 4:3** For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”

**Romans 5:19** For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.

Question: How can God declare someone righteous who is unrighteous?

“It does not mean that we are made righteous, but rather that God regards us as righteous and declares us to be righteous. This has often been a difficulty to many people. They say that because they are conscious of sin within they cannot be in a justified state; but anyone who speaks like that shows immediately that he has no understanding of this great and crucial doctrine of justification. Justification makes no actual change in us; but is a declaration by God concerning us. It is not something that results from what we do but rather something that is done for us. We have only been made righteous in the sense that God regards us as righteous, and pronounces us to be righteous.” D. M. Lloyd-Jones

**C. God can declare us because He imputes Christ’s righteousness to us**

Bryan Estelle: [What is Imputation](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYhGXfXEfmM) (video, 2:06) -<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYhGXfXEfmM>

This is in distinction from the infusion of righteousness. Imputation means that God regards Christ's righteousness as belonging to us. Infusion refers to God putting righteousness into us in our practical living.

God "*made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*" ([2 Cor 5:21](#)) This passage has been called the double exchange: Christ who was, is and forever will be sinless had the sins of the saints reckoned to Him so that in Him they might be reckoned righteous.

"The great exchange is no legal fiction, no arbitrary pretense, no mere word-game, on God's part, but a costly achievement. The divinely established solidarity between Christ and his people was such that he was in truth 'made sin' for us, and 'bore in his soul the dreadful torments of a condemned and lost man' so that in our souls the joy of knowing God's forgiveness and favor might reign forever." – J.I. Packer

**1 Corinthians 1:30** *And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption*

**Philippians 3:9** *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*

**Romans 10:3-4** *For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*

Question: What do you think of the common definition of "justified" that describes it as "just-as-if-I'd" never sinned?

**D. Justification comes to us entirely by God's grace, not on account of any merit in ourselves**

**Romans 3:20-26** *For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. ...But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— <sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> 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.*

**Ephesians 2:8-9** *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

“Now Paul explains the means whereby God pardons us. We are ‘justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus’ ([Rom 3:24](#)). Paul tells us that God’s freely bestowed declaration of our innocence is the answer to our problem. Notice that this justification is not based on anything in us — not our works, nor our goodness, nor our faith, nor our foreseen faith or works, nor our future faithfulness. It is based on something else outside of us. In fact, it is a gift. You don’t earn, deserve, merit or contribute to God’s gift. You receive it by faith as a gift of His grace.” – Ligon Duncan, [Justification — Still the Radical Truth](#)

## **E. God justifies us through our faith in Jesus**

***Galatians 2:16*** yet we know that a person is not justified 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.

***Romans 5:1*** Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

***Romans 4:16*** That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all

We contribute nothing to our salvation except the sin from which we need to be redeemed. “Sola gratia, sola fide, sola Christus”

What does faith DO in justification? Faith receives. Faith is the beggars hand extended for food. Faith receives the perfect obedience of Jesus and His sacrifice for sin.

Question: How do we explain the relationship between faith and works? What about James 2?

Paul Mizzi: [Faith and Works](#) - <http://www.tecmalta.org/tft219.htm>

R.C. Sproul: [Faith and Works](#) - <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/faith-and-works/>

John Piper: [Does James Contradict Paul?](#) - <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/does-james-contradict-paul>

“Regeneration is an act of God in us; justification is a declaration of God with respect to us. The distinction is like that of the distinction between the act of a surgeon and the act of a judge. ... The purity of the gospel is bound up with the recognition of this distinction. If justification is confused with regeneration or sanctification, then the door is opened for the perversion of the gospel at its center. Justification is still the article of the standing or falling of the Church.” – John Murray, [Redemption Accomplished and Applied](#), 121.

# Regeneration

“The gospel addresses itself to sinners who are dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1). ‘Dead’ is a very strong word. There are no degrees of deadness. You cannot be half dead. If you are dead you are totally unable to do anything to change your condition (Jeremiah 13:23). A dead man in a coffin can do absolutely nothing to prevent a burial. When Paul says we are dead in sin, he means we are unable to change our spiritual condition. We are spiritually helpless and hopeless and if our condition is to change, God must do it because we cannot. We need to be born again.” Jeffery, *Bitesize Theology*, 53.

Regeneration is a secret act of God in which he imparts new spiritual life to us. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 699.

## A. Regeneration is spiritual new birth.

**John 3:3-8** Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” <sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ <sup>8</sup> The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

## B. Regeneration is totally an act of God.

**John 1:12-13** But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

**Titus 3:3-7** For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. <sup>4</sup> But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

c.f. John MacArthur Sermon, “[God’s Role in Regeneration](http://www.gty.org/resources/Sermons/43-13/Gods-Role-in-Regeneration)” - <http://www.gty.org/resources/Sermons/43-13/Gods-Role-in-Regeneration>

1. We have no more say in our spiritual rebirth than we do in our physical birth.

**Colossians 2:13** And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,

**1 Peter 1:3** *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,*

**James 1:18** *Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

2. All persons of our Triune God are active in our spiritual new birth.

**John 3:8** *The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*

**Ephesians 2:5** *even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—*

**James 1:18** *Of his own will he [Father of lights] brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

**1 Peter 1:3** *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,*

### **C. Regeneration is where the work of grace begins in the sinner.**

1. Its exact nature is as mysterious to us as the wind.

**John 3:6-8** *That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ <sup>8</sup> The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*

2. Regeneration occurs as God awakens our soul through the preaching of the Gospel.

**Romans 10:17** *So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*

**1 Peter 1:23, 25** *since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; ... but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you.*

**John 5:24** *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

3. Regeneration must occur before saving faith can be expressed in repentance. Faith and repentance is our response to the Gospel. But in order to respond to spiritual truths, there must already be spiritual life inside us.



**John 6:44, 65** *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. ... And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."*

**Acts 16:14** *One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.*

**1 Corinthians 2:14** *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*

**Rom 3:11** *[Apart from God's regenerating work of grace] no one understands; no one seeks for God.*

**1 John 5:1** *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.*

"Regeneration is the beginning of all saving grace in us, and all saving grace in exercise on our part proceeds from the fountain of regeneration. We are not born again by faith or repentance or conversion; we repent and believe because we have been regenerated." John Murray

Question: Is it wrong to teach that "If you believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior, then you will be born again."? Why or why not?

R.C. Sproul "[The New Birth](http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/new-birth/)" - <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/new-birth/>

#### **D. Regeneration affects every part of a person.**

1. Our inner person is made alive by God's Spirit through regeneration.

**Romans 8:10-11** *But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> 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.*

2. Regeneration provides a new nature and new heart in fulfillment of God's new covenant promises.

**Ezekiel 36:25-27** *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. <sup>26</sup> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*



**Ezekiel 37:13-14** And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. <sup>14</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord.”

**Jeremiah 32:38-41** And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. <sup>39</sup> I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. <sup>40</sup> I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. <sup>41</sup> I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.

**Jeremiah 31:33-34** <sup>33</sup> For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup> And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

**Hebrews 10:15-17** And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, <sup>16</sup> “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,” <sup>17</sup> then he adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”

3. Every part of our lives are made new in regeneration.

**2 Corinthians 5:17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

## **E. Regeneration is an absolute requirement for eternal life.**

**John 3:3, 5** Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” ...<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Note: Nicodemus was a very religious man. Christianity is not moralism. Just because a person is honest, industrious, and respectable does not mean that they are a Christian. Jesus makes it very clear. There are no exceptions to this. Without this spiritual birth there is no spiritual life.

**Galatians 6:15** For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

Question: What is the difference between religious and moral life, and spiritual life?

Question: How many times does someone need to be “born again?”

**F. Regeneration necessarily changes our relationship to sin, and is manifested by fruits worthy of repentance and faith.**

**Galatians 5:22-23** *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

1. The regenerated heart will be growing in righteousness.

**1 John 2:29** *If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.*

2. The regenerated heart will refrain from a habitual practice of sin.

**1 John 3:9** *No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.*

3. The regenerated heart will love others.

**1 John 4:7** *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.*

4. The regenerated heart will believe that Jesus is the Christ.

**1 John 5:1** *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.*

5. The regenerated heart will overcome the temptations of the world.

**1 John 5:4** *For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.*

6. The regenerated heart will be kept safe from ultimate harm by the evil one.

**1 John 5:18** *We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.*