

Cedarville University
Doctrinal White Paper
The Doctrine of Justification

The fifth article of the Cedarville University doctrinal statement states:

“We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures as a representative and substitutionary sacrifice and rose again for our justification; and that all who believe in Him are justified on the grounds of His shed blood and are saved by grace through faith wholly apart from human merit and works. (Acts 13:39; 16:31; Romans 3:21-28; Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:3-8).”

The statement “. . . all who believe in Him are justified on the grounds of his shed blood . . .” is understood by the Trustees to mean that justification is an accomplished reality at the point of faith. Those who believe and teach that the justification of the believer at the moment of faith is contingent upon later acts of righteousness or any action or activity in addition to faith cannot in good conscience declare themselves to be in agreement with article five of the doctrinal statement.

The biblical language of justification employs a legal metaphor and is used throughout Scripture to speak of the event whereby persons are set or declared to be in right relation to God.¹ It is appropriate to say, then, that Christians have been justified in the past. That is, when genuine believers convert to faith in Christ they are justified before God.

As Paul Enns states:

“All, who have come to God through faith have been fully justified at the moment of faith. To justify is to declare righteous the one who has faith in Jesus Christ. It is a forensic (legal) act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner righteous on the basis of the blood of Christ.”²

In agreement with Louis Berkhof, the Trustees understand that article five’s reference to justification and justified must be understood as a once for all event in the believer’s life. “It is not repeated, neither is it a process; it is complete at once and for all time. There is no more or less in justification; man is either fully justified or he is not justified at all.”³

In the Protestant understanding this declaration on the part of God is called forensic justification. Forensic justification, then, is a declaration, an act, that God makes

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine*, 723.

² Paul Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, 337.

³ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 513.

outside or apart from man. It is the judicial pronouncement of God about a sinful man that he, as a result of placing his faith in Christ, now stands before God having the status of justness. In brief, the sinful man has been officially declared pardoned by God and stands before God with the imputed (credited) righteousness of Christ (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:9;5:19).

In his commentary on Romans, F.F.Bruce writes the following in reference to Romans 3:24:

Paul's hope before he became a Christian, was that by dint of perseverance in observing the law of God, he might at length be pronounced righteous by God when he stood before His judgment-seat. But in this way of righteousness apart from the law, the procedure is reversed: God pronounces a man righteous at the beginning of his course, not the end of it. If He pronounces him righteous at the beginning of his course, it cannot be on the basis of works which he has not yet done . . .⁴

The Trustees concur with Bruce's reading of Romans 3:24 and express the conviction that those who would hold positions on justification which do not expressly communicate that justification in the believers life is an accomplished fact, or who argue that justification cannot be determined before some future judgment on the part of God, or who argue that good works of any kind are required in order to be justified stand outside of an acceptable understanding of the intent and meaning of article five of the Cedarville University doctrinal statement. The Trustees also affirm that good works are to be found in the believer's life and are evidence of true justification.

Since the establishment of the university's current doctrinal statement until the present, the clearly understood meaning of article five has included the commitment to the concept of forensic justification and the understanding that justification is an accomplished fact in the believer's life. The current Board of Trustees once more affirms that believers are declared righteous by God at the point of faith and that this act of declaring believers righteous is an accomplished reality for all believers. They consider all positions which are contrary to this understanding to be incompatible with the Cedarville University Doctrinal Statement.

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⁴ FF.Bruce, The Epistle to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary. Grand Rapids, 1963, 103.