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Justification by Faith According to the Old Testament: In the Footsteps of the Reformers

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I. Importance of the Issue

In what is likely the earliest book of the Bible, the patriarch Job asked the penetrating question: “How can a mortal be just before God?” (Job 9:2 NRSV). Down through the centuries this question of one’s standing before God, how one is justified by Him, has been viewed as the most crucial question faced by human beings, foundational to all other questions.

Martin Luther asserted that “if we lose the doctrine of justification, we lose simply everything.”¹ Luther believed that justification is “the article with and by which the church stands, without which it falls.”² In the preface to his Forty-Five Theses drawn up in 1537, Luther makes this impassioned plea: “The article of justification is the master and prince, the lord, the ruler, and the judge over all kinds of doctrines; it preserves and governs all Church doctrine and raises up our conscience before God. Without this article the world is utter death and darkness.”³

John Calvin considered the doctrine of justification to be “the main hinge upon which religion turns.” He explained further: “For unless you understand first of all what your position is

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¹ Martin Luther, Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4, vol. 26 of Luther’s Works, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 26.
² Martin Luther, What Luther Says: An Anthology, ed. Ewald M. Plass, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 2:704, n. 5. Though these words were not coined by Luther himself, it is widely recognized that they represent well his thought. See Paul Rhodes Eddy, James K. Beilby and Steven E. Enderlein, “Justification in Historical Perspective,” in Justification: Five Views, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 24.
before God, and what the judgment which he passes upon you, you have no foundation on which your salvation can be laid, or on which piety towards God can be reared.”

Ellen White wrote, in the wake of the 1888 General Conference session, “The light given me of God places this important subject [justification by faith] above any question in my mind.” At the same time she warned that this subject is liable to be confused and is the object of Satan’s attack: “The danger has been presented to me again and again of entertaining, as a people, false ideas of justification by faith. I have been shown for years that Satan would work in a special manner to confuse the mind on this point.” Luther had earlier given similar warnings: “Whoever falls from the doctrine of justification is ignorant of God and is an idolater. . . .For once this doctrine is undermined, nothing more remains but sheer error, hypocrisy, wickedness and idolatry, regardless of how great sanctity that appears on the outside.” “No error is so insignificant, so clumsy, so outworn as not to be supremely pleasing to human reason and to seduce us if we are without the knowledge and the contemplation of this article [of justification].” We must clearly understand the truth about justification by faith, in view of its central importance in our lives and in view of Satan’s special work to undermine and to confuse minds on this foundational biblical teaching.

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3 Luther, *What Luther Says*, 2:703. See also his statement in the *Smalcald Articles* of 1537: “Nothing in this article can be given up or compromised, even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed.” WA 50, 119.


5 Ellen White, *FW* 20.

6 White, *FW* 18.

7 Luther, *Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4*, 395-396.

8 Luther, *What Luther Says*, 2:703.
II. The Debate over Justification: Differing Views

A. The Traditional Protestant View

The Protestant Reformation occurred largely in protest against the Catholic understanding of justification which Protestant theologians considered to be a gross distortion of the biblical teaching.

Building upon the writings of Paul, especially Romans and Galatians, and the roots in the OT, Martin Luther presented justifying righteousness as “the alien righteousness of Christ.” This was in opposition to Augustinian understanding, in which justifying righteousness, although completely through the grace of God, was something that inhered in the human recipient.

Luther affirmed that the justified Christian was simul justus et peccator. R. C. Sproul explains:

Luther’s famous dictum simul justus et peccator goes to the heart of the issue regarding forensic justification. The Latin phrase means “at the same time just and sinner.” This simultaneous condition refers to the situation wherein the sinner is counted just forensically by virtue of the imputation of Christ, while he remains in and of himself, yet a sinner.

This represents the understanding of the magisterial Reformers, esp. Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Philip Melanchthon, whose views on justification were for the most part followed by Arminius (Arminianism) and John Wesley (Methodism) and many other Protestant theologians and traditions. For recent treatment of the traditional Reformation doctrine, see, esp. Thomas Schreiner, Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification: What the Reformers Taught . . . and Why It Still Matters (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015). For discussion (with bibliography) of the history of other views on justification, such as that of the Early Church (e.g., Origen, Augustine) Latin Middle Ages (e.g., Anselm and Acquinas), Anabaptists and the “Radical Reformation” (e.g., Menno Simons), Liberal Protestantism (e.g., Albrecht Ritschl), Existential Re-interpretations (Paul Tillich and Rudolf Bultmann), Karl Barth, Liberation and feminist theology (e.g., Elsa Tamez), Pentecostal Theologies (Frank Macchia) and Finnish Lutheran theology (Tuomo Mannermaa, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen), see, e.g., Eddy, Beilby and Enderlein, “Justification in Historical Perspective,” 13-52.

The “Finnish school” of Luther interpretation, in dialogue with Russian Orthodox theology, claims that Luther’s view was closer to the orthodox understanding of theosis “deification,” and that for Luther justifying righteousness was not solely an alien righteousness: “in line with Catholic theology, justification means both declaring righteous and making righteous.” (Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “Deification View,” in Justification: Five Views, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011], 222.) For a critique of this view, from the perspective of the traditional interpretation of Luther, see Michael S. Horton’s “Traditional Reformed Response” to Kärkkäinen’s chapter, on pp. 244-249.
Luther did not mean that the sinner who is still a sinner is an unchanged person. The sinner who has saving faith is a regenerate person. He is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But he is still unjust in himself. Nor does it mean that the sinner is not in a real process of sanctification by which he is becoming just. Those who possess saving faith necessarily, inevitably, and immediately begin to manifest the fruits of faith, which are works of obedience. However, the grounds of that person’s justification remain solely and exclusively the imputed righteousness of Christ. It is by His righteousness and His righteousness alone that the sinner is declared to be just.11

For Luther, justification was not before the on-looking eyes of men, but coram Deo “before the face of God”, or as his theological colleague Philip Melancthon put it, “before the heavenly divine tribunal.” Grace was not a holy substance that came down from God and inhaled in the human being; it was an attitude of divine favor.

Melancthon further worked out Luther’s concepts using more precise language of imputation. Justification was presented as the divine act of declaring sinners righteous, based upon the extrinsic, imputed, righteousness of Christ. This was in contrast with Augustine, who saw justification as God’s making sinners righteous by a conversion of their wills.12

Calvin’s doctrine of justification was deeply indebted to the concepts developed by Luther and Melancthon.13 Calvin eloquently emphasizes the forensic nature of justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ as he clearly summarizes the doctrine in his Institutes:

12 The mature Melancthon also grasped the concept of the human free will in which salvation was truly available to all human beings, unlike Calvin and Luther who held on to a doctrine of predestination. See Gregory B. Graybill, Evangelical Free Will: Philip Melanchthon’s Journey on the Origins of Faith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
A man will be justified by faith when, excluded from the righteousness of works, he by faith lays hold of the righteousness of Christ and clothed in it appears in the sight of God not as a sinner, but as righteous. Thus we simply interpret justification as the acceptance with which God receives us into His favor as if we were righteous. And we say that this justification consists in the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ.\textsuperscript{14} 

To justify, therefore, is nothing else than to acquit from the charge of guilt, as if innocence were proved. Hence, when God justifies us through the intercession of Christ, he does not acquit us on a proof of our own innocence, but by an imputation of righteousness, so that though not righteous in ourselves, we are deemed righteous in Christ.\textsuperscript{15} …Christ’s righteousness. . .must appear in court on our behalf, and stand surety for us in judgment. Received from God, this righteousness is brought to us and imputed to us, just as if it were ours.\textsuperscript{16}

For Calvin, justification is not separated from union with Christ. In fact, “Calvin speaks of a mystical union with Christ wrought by the Holy Spirit, the Author of faith, the Creator of this community of righteousness, and from this union arises a double grace: justification and sanctification. They are simultaneous, and although they can be distinguished, they cannot be separated.”\textsuperscript{17} Calvin writes: “I acknowledge that we are devoid of this incomparable gift [of justification] until Christ becomes ours. Therefore, to that union of the head and members, the residence of Christ in our hearts, in fine, the mystical union, we assign the highest rank, Christ when he becomes ours making us partners with him in the gifts with which he was endued.”\textsuperscript{18}

Calvin understood that justification and sanctification occur simultaneously and are inseparable, but must be distinguished:

As Christ cannot be divided into parts, so the two things, justification and sanctification, which we perceive to be united together in him, are inseparable. Whomsoever, therefore, God received into his favour, he presents with the Spirit

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., III.xi.3.
\textsuperscript{16} Calvin, \textit{Institutes} (1536 ed.), I.32.
\textsuperscript{17} Wübbenhorst, “Calvin’s Doctrine of Justification,” 115.
\textsuperscript{18} Calvin, \textit{Institutes} (1559 ed.), III.xi.10.
of adoption, whose agency forms them anew into his image. But if the brightness of the sun cannot be separated from its heat, are we therefore to say that the earth is warmed by light and illumined by heat? Nothing can be more apposite to the matter in hand than this simile. The sun by its heat quickens and fertilizes the earth; by its rays enlightens and illumines it. Here is a mutual and undivided connection, and yet reason itself prohibits us from transferring the peculiar properties of the one to the other.19

While the Magisterial Reformers (we refer especially to Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Philip Melancthon) emphasized different aspects of the doctrine, and experienced their own personal growth in understanding its meaning,20 by 1540 there was general consensus regarding its essential contours. Alister McGrath summarizes the main points of the consensus:

1. Justification is the forensic declaration that the Christian is righteous, rather than the process by which he or she is made righteous. It involves a change in status rather than in nature.
2. A deliberate and systematic distinction is made between justification (the external act by which God declares the believer to be righteous) and sanctification or regeneration (the internal process of renewal by the Holy Spirit).
3. Justifying righteousness as the alien righteousness of Christ, imputed to the believer and external to him, not a righteousness that is inherent within him, located within him, or in any way belonging to him.
4. Justification takes place _per fidem propter Christum_ [“through faith on account of Christ”], with faith being understood as the God-given means of justification and the merits of Christ as the God-given foundation of justification.21

This basic understanding of justification was accepted by later Reformers, such as Arminius22 and John Wesley,23 and became embodied in the major Protestant creeds in their treatment of Justification.24

19 Ibid., III.xi.6. The mature Calvin wants to emphasize this point so much that in his final 1559 edition of the _Institutes_ reverses the order of his treatment of justification and sanctification, putting the latter first.
20 For more details and substantiation, see, e.g., Bruce L. McCormack, ed. _Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges_ (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker; Edinburgh, Scotland: Rutherford House, 2006); and Schreiner, _Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification_, 37-63.
21 Alister McGrath, _Justification by Faith_ (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 61.
22 See Arminius’ own statement: “It is a justification by which a man, who is a sinner, yet a believer, being placed before the throne of grace which is erected in Christ Jesus the Propitiation, is accounted and pronounced by
Protestant versus Catholic View of Justification

The Magisterial Reformers (including Luther, Calvin, Melancthon, and we can add, Arminius and Wesley) rejected the Roman Catholic view of justification. R. C. Sproul summarizes the basic issues at stake in the Reformation rejection of Catholic doctrine regarding justification:

In simple terms the issue boils down to this: Are we justified by a process by which we become actually just or are we justified by a declarative act by which we are counted or reckoned to be just by God? Are we declared just or are we made just in justification?25 “The conflict over justification by faith alone boils down to this: Is the ground of our justification the righteousness of Christ imputed to us [the Reformation view], or the righteousness of Christ working within us [the Catholic view]? For the Reformers the doctrine of justification by faith alone meant justification by Christ and His righteousness alone.”26

Inseparably connected to the doctrine of forensic justification is the concept of imputation. The issue of the Reformation focused on the distinction between infused righteousness and imputed righteousness. For Roman Catholicism, justification occurs via the infusion of the grace of Christ, which makes righteousness possible if the believer assents to and cooperates with this grace.27

God, the just and merciful Judge, righteous and worthy of the reward of righteousness, not in himself but in Christ, of grace, according to the gospel, to the praise of the righteousness and grace of God, and to the salvation of the justified person himself.” (Rom. iii. 24-26; 3, 4, 5, 10, 11.)” Cf. Arminius, “Disputation 19: On the Justification of Man Before God” in Works, vol. 1 (accessed at http://www.ccel.org/ccel/arminius/works1.v.xx.html): “I am not conscious to myself, of having taught or entertained any other sentiments concerning the justification of man before God, than those which are held unanimously by the Reformed and Protestant Churches, and which are in complete agreement with their expressed opinions. . . .” Arminius, however, as did the mature Melancthon, widened justification to include all who chose to accept it (and not just the elect as for Luther and Calvin).

23 For a summary of the views of Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley on justification, see, e.g., Schreiner, Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification, 80-94.


The Reformers did not exclude the infusion of grace. Grace is poured into the soul. The issue was the grounds of our justification. For the Reformers the sole grounds are the imputed righteousness of Christ, not the inherent righteousness of the believer or the infused righteousness of Christ. . . .It is the inherent righteousness of Christ, not the inherent righteousness of the believer that is the ground of our justification.28

At the Council of Trent (1545-1563) the Roman Catholic Church, in its Decree on Justification (1547), not only systematically rejected the distinctive tenets of justification by faith alone as espoused by the Reformers, but also anathematized anyone who believed or taught such beliefs.29 Thomas Schreiner summarizes the major conclusions regarding justification decided at Trent:

At Trent, justification is understood to be a process and is defined in terms of inherent righteousness. Justification by faith alone is categorically rejected, and justification is

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28 Ibid., 36-37.
29 Here are some sample statements from the Council of Trent’s Decree on Justification. (See H. J. Schroeder, Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent [London: Herder, 1941]). Regarding justification by faith alone: “If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will, let him be anathema” (Session six, canon 9; Schroeder, Canons, 43 ). Canon 10 rejects the forensic nature of justification: “If anyone says that men are justified without the justice of Christ whereby He merited for us, or by that justice are formally just, let him be anathema” (ibid.). Canon 11 insists that justification takes place via the infused righteousness of Christ, not his imputed righteousness: “If anyone says that men are justified either by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ alone or by the remission of sins alone, to the exclusion of the grace and love that is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Spirit, and is inherent in them; or even that the grace by which we are justified is only the favor of God, let him be anathema.” Cited in modern translation in John M. MacArthur, “Long before Luther (Jesus and the Doctrine of Justification),” in Justification by Faith Alone: Affirming the Doctrine by Which the Church and the Individual Stands or Falls, revised and updated edition; ed. John Kistler (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2003), 12. In chapter 7 of Trent’s sixth session, justification is conflated with sanctification: “This disposition or preparation is followed by justification itself, which is not only a remission of sins but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man through the voluntary reception of the grace and gifts whereby an unjust man becomes just” (Schroeder, Canons, 33). In chapter 3, justification is seen as God not only pronouncing a man just but making him just: “if they were not born again in Christ, they would never be justified, since in that new birth there is bestowed upon them, through the merit of His passion, the grace by which they are made just” (Schroeder, Canons, 30-31). Finally, in chapter 9 of the Decree of Justification in the Council assurance of salvation is denied: “no one can know with the certainty of faith, which cannot be subject to error, that he has obtained the grace of God” (cited in Klaas Runia, “Justification and Roman Catholicism,” in Right with God: Justification in the Bible and the World, ed. D. A. Carson [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998], 215).
based in part on human works. Hence, the notion that righteousness is imputed to us is also repudiated, along with the notion that one can have assurance of final salvation.30

John Gerstner highlights the major difference between Protestant Catholic thinking regarding justification from the perspective of the relationship between faith and works. He points out how for the Protestant justification is by faith alone, but it is never without works. As he puts it, “Justification is by faith alone, but NOT by a faith that is alone.’ Justification is by a WORKING faith.”31 “Justification is ultimately by works—the works of Jesus Christ! They are received by the justified sinner as his own works. Christ justified His people by His works as their works; works done by them in their Substitute.”32 “Justification comes by faith, to which is immediately and inseparably added works.”33

Gerstner uses three formulas to illustrate the views of (1) Protestants, (2) Catholics, and 3) the common Roman Catholic caricature of Protestantism:34

1. Reformation view:
   
   FAITH → JUSTIFICATION + WORKS

2. Roman Catholic Error:

   FAITH + WORKS → JUSTIFICATION

3. Common Roman caricature of Protestantism:

   FAITH → JUSTIFICATION — WORKS

He summarizes: “Justification by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone, is the teaching of the Reformation.”35

30 Schreiner, Faith Alone, 66.
32 Ibid., 118.
34 Ibid., 150-151.
Recent Protestant Rapprochement with Catholics

In recent years there has been a trend, at least in America, for a number of evangelicals to engage in dialogue with Roman Catholics, and in a surprising turn of events, many evangelicals are now returning to Rome, reaching consensus with RC scholars, and proclaiming that the Reformation was a misunderstanding that should have never happened. Some evangelical scholars have actually returned to Roman Catholicism.

For example, Scott Hahn is a former Presbyterian turned Catholic. He tells of his journey back to Catholicism in his book, *Rome Sweet Home*. He now teaches in the theology department at Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio, and is an articulate spokesman for the Catholic view on justification.

Others who have not left Protestantism, now argue that the concept of imputation of Christ’s righteousness in justification is not biblical. For example, Robert Gundry, biblical scholar at Westmont College, writes that “the doctrine that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to believing sinners needs to be abandoned.”


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35 Ibid., 151.
justified by grace through faith because of Christ.” But it says nothing about justification by faith alone, nothing about the imputed righteousness of Christ, nothing about forensic (only) justification. Those upholding the traditional view of justification are convinced that this document basically “trivialized the Reformation.”

In 1997 the signatories of this document, after a year of study, issued a clarifying statement entitled “The Gift of Salvation.” While claiming that “what we here affirm is in agreement with what the Reformation traditions have meant by justification by faith alone (sola fide),” in fact the essential contours of the Roman Catholic teaching are still embraced.

On October 31 (the date of the posting of the 95 Theses by Martin Luther in 1517), 1999, in Augsburg, Germany (the city which gave its name to the first Lutheran Confession of Faith), leading officials from the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church issued a

41 Here are the relevant paragraphs from the document:

Justification is central to the scriptural account of salvation, and its meaning has been much debated between Protestants and Catholics. We agree that justification is not earned by any good works or merits of our own; it is entirely God’s gift, conferred through the Father’s sheer graciousness, out of the love that he bears us in his Son, who suffered on our behalf and rose from the dead for our justification. Jesus was “put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Romans 4:25). In justification, God, on the basis of Christ’s righteousness alone, declares us to be no longer his rebellious enemies but his forgiven friends, and by virtue of his declaration it is so.

The New Testament makes it clear that the gift of justification is received through faith. "By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). By faith, which is also the gift of God, we repent of our sins and freely adhere to the Gospel, the good news of God’s saving work for us in Christ. By our response of faith to Christ, we enter into the blessings promised by the Gospel. Faith is not merely intellectual assent but an act of the whole person, involving the mind, the will, and the affections, issuing in a changed life. We understand that what we here affirm is in agreement with what the Reformation traditions have meant by justification by faith alone (sola fide).

In justification we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, through whom the love of God is poured forth into our hearts (Romans 5:5). The grace of Christ and the gift of the Spirit received through faith (Galatians 3:14) are experienced and expressed in diverse ways by different Christians and in different Christian traditions, but God’s gift is never dependent upon our human experience or our ways of expressing that experience.
“Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,”\textsuperscript{42} in which it was affirmed that the differences that remain between Lutherans and Catholics no longer warrant any ecclesiastical division. The Joint Declaration claims to having reached “a consensus on basic truths” and “a shared understanding of justification” (Par. 14), disclaiming having reached full agreement on the entire doctrine. Many Lutheran churches, both within and outside the federation, rejected the declaration, and the chairperson of the Missouri Synod of Lutherans, A. L. Barry, denounced the document as “a betrayal of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{43} More than one hundred and fifty theologians signed a protest against the declaration. A close reading of the declaration reveals that the distinctive differences between the Protestant and Catholic positions have not been abandoned.\textsuperscript{44}

The “New Perspective” on Paul and Justification

Spearheaded by the triumvirate E. P. Sanders,\textsuperscript{45} James Dunn,\textsuperscript{46} and N. T. Wright\textsuperscript{47} in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and continuing till the present, a “New Perspective” on Paul does not


\textsuperscript{44} For demonstration of how Catholics have not changed their views since Trent, see esp. Schreiner, \textit{Faith Alone}, 209-230; and Runia, “Justification and Roman Catholicism,” 197-215. Most of the sections of the Declaration separate between the Lutheran and the Catholic positions on respective points, even though there is an attempt to reconcile these differences. So, for example, Section 4.2 is Entitled “Justification as Forgiveness of Sins and Making Righteous,” the first part (“forgiveness of sins”) being the Lutheran view, and the second (“making righteous) the Catholic view. \textit{Notice again what is not affirmed by both: by faith alone, the imputed righteousness of Christ and forensic (only) justification, and personal assurance of salvation}. For a collection of all the main documents in the recent Protestant-Catholic rapprochement over the doctrine of justification, and a sympathetic assessment, see, e.g., Anthony N. S. Lane, \textit{Justification in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment} (London: T & T Clark, 2002).

claim to be presenting a position on justification that is fundamentally antithetical to the concerns of the Reformers, but rather to offer additional and corrective perspectives to the traditional Reformation position.

There are major points where the “New Perspective” gives support to the traditional Protestant view, and other emphases provide a broader (but still harmonious) context for understanding justification than often considered in the traditional view.

In some crucial areas, however, the “New Perspective” seems to depart from the traditional Protestant understanding of justification and related concepts. First, it builds on a new understanding of first-century Judaism, which rejects the Reformation view that Judaism was a legalistic religion in which one earned salvation by works of the law. Rather, as Sanders summarizes, the Jewish religion is seen to be one of “covenant nomism”: “Salvation is by grace. . works are the condition of remaining ‘in,’ but they do not earn salvation.”


48 For examples: (1) justification is forensic (a divine legal declaration) and not transformative (making someone righteous); (2) perfect obedience is needed to be right with God; and (3) God’s wrath is propitiated by Jesus’ death.

49 These include, especially: (1) the divine lawcourt setting; (2) the big picture of the covenant and God’s purpose for the descendants of Abraham; and (3) the eschatological dimension of justification (the final verdict is announced in advance). Schreiner (Faith Alone, 239-264), provides good evidence for the conclusion that these “larger perspectives” of the “New Perspective” harmonize with and enrich the Reformation view.

50 For this section I am indebted not only to the writings of Sanders, Dunn, and Wright, but also to those who have provided constructive critique of their views. See, in particular, Schreiner, Faith Alone, 239-261; and John Piper, The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007); Mark A. Seifrid, Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul’s Theology of Justification, New Testament Studies in Biblical Theology, 9 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000); Guy Prentiss Waters, Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004); and Stephen Westerholm, Justification Reconsidered: Rethinking a Pauline Theme (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013).

51 Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism, 543 (italics original).
was not to this “covenant nomism” but to Judaism’s rejection of Jesus Christ as the sole path of salvation.

Second, according to Dunn and Wright, Paul’s reference to the “works of the law” do not deal with the attempt on the part of Jews to keep the law in order to be saved (as in the traditional Reformation understanding), but rather refer to the particular laws of Judaism such as circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and dietary laws, that functioned as “ethnic badges” of Judaism, marking the boundary between Jews and Gentiles.52

Thirdly, the “righteousness of God” is defined as His faithfulness to the covenant promises made to Abraham, and not as moral virtue or conformity to a norm which is His own character, as understand by the Reformers.53

Fourth, in contrast to the Reformers who viewed justification as soteriological (how one is right with God), for Wright justification is seen as primarily ecclesiological. Wright wrote, “Justification is not how someone becomes a Christian. It is the declaration that they have become a Christian. . . . What Paul means by justification, in this context should therefore be clear. It is not ‘how you become a Christian,’ as much as ‘how you can tell who is a member of the covenant family.’”54

Fifth, proponents of the “New Perspective” state that “Israel’s fundamental problem was its failure to bless the world” (an instrumental problem), in contrast to the Reformer’s

53 See Dunn, “New Perspective View,” 182-183; Wright, Justification, 64-71.
understanding of Paul which emphasizes “Israel’s inherent sinfulness” (an ontological problem.)

Sixth, proponents of the “New Perspective” on Paul deny that the Reformation concept of imputation is biblical. Wright states categorically, “If Paul uses the language of the law court, it makes no sense whatever to say that the judge imputed, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfers his righteousness either to the plaintiff or the defendant.” No righteousness is imputed by God to the believer.

Finally, the “New perspective” proponents regularly understand the phrase *pistis Christou* not as referring to the believer’s “faith in Christ,” as the Reformer’s took it, but rather as a reference to “Christ’s faith or faithfulness.”

To what extent are these divergences from the traditional view of various aspects of justification faithful to Scripture, and to what extent do they veer away from the mark of biblical truth?

**Seventh-day Adventists Alternatives to the Traditional Reformation View**

In the last few decades there has been a number of Adventist voices who oppose the Reformation view of forensic justification, including the imputation of the righteousness of

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55 Summary by Schreiner, *Faith Alone*, 244. See also Wright, *Justification*, 195.
57 Instead of imputation, Wright argues for the concept of representation: the Messiah “represents his people, now appropriately standing in for them, taking upon himself the death which they deserved, so that they might not suffer it themselves” (*Justification*, 105).
59 I have purposely not identified by name specific individuals or groups within this section of the paper, because it is hoped that the focus will be upon the issues and not individuals or “camps” within Adventism. In this paper we do not address the view of some Adventists called “corporate” or “objective” or “universal” justification which is seen to have taken place at the Cross. This position calls for extended separate treatment and evaluation in another venue.
Christ. They see the whole legal model of justification as either not biblical, or as a culturally-conditioned expression of the atonement which spoke to the primitive mindset in biblical times, but now is transcended by a larger view of the atonement that eliminates this forensic imputation.

There are other Adventists who accept forensic justification in principle, but go on to state that justification means more than imputation of Christ’s righteousness, but also includes the process by which Christ actually makes us righteous. According to this view, justification is primarily to “make righteous,” not just to “declare righteous,” or else it would be only a legal fiction. Despite protests to the contrary, proponents of this view seem to adopt major Catholic arguments against the Reformers in the 16th century. Justification is both imputed and imparted righteousness, in the view of these SDA interpreters.

Some Adventists maintain that justification means only the forgiveness of past sins when one first comes to Christ, but after one’s initial justification, acceptance by God is based on Christ’s infused righteousness that makes one righteous and thereby acceptable in God’s sight. Linked to this position is the understanding is that there is a necessity for absolute sinfulness of God’s people in the end-time, which will in effect make objective justification no longer needed because God’s people have reached a state of sanctification where objective (imputed) justification is wholly replaced by the imparted righteousness of Christ.

After this brief survey of differing views on justification, we need to ask ourselves: Is the Reformation view of justification solid, or should we be going back to Rome, or in some other direction as suggested by other views mentioned above? The only way to answer this question is
to test the various views by the Word of God. What is the biblical teaching about justification? Let’s go to the Scriptures!

**III. The Biblical Teaching on Justification by Faith (Focused on OT Passages)**

Most biblical studies on justification focus almost entirely upon the Pauline writings, but Paul himself goes to the OT to base his doctrine of justification! Paul explicitly states, “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, *to which the Law and Prophets testify*” (Rom 3:21). In this study, following the lead of Paul (who was arguably the greatest “Old Testament theologian”!), we go directly to the OT, concentrating especially on those passages utilized by Paul, and in the process we will see how Paul and other NT writers develops their teachings on justification based upon the OT witness.60

This approach also follows in the footsteps of the Reformers, who pointed to the OT sources for Paul’s theology of justification. For example, major landmarks in Luther’s growing understanding of justification by faith centered in OT passages. In the fall of 1510, in connection with his visit to Rome, several times he was particularly struck with the words of Hab 2:20, cited in Rom 1:17. “The just shall live by faith!” In his (*Turmerlebnis*), or “Tower Discovery” (probably in 1519) when Luther had a major breakthrough in understand the meaning of “the righteousness of God,” he found the key during his lectures on the Psalms.61 In his preface to his

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60 For an example of the rare instances where a biblical study on justification does give considerable emphasis upon the OT roots of Paul’s doctrine of justification, see Edmond P. Clowney, “The Biblical Doctrine of Justification by Faith,” in *Right with God: Justification in the Bible and the World*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 19-37.

61 Probably while he was studying Psalm 31 or 71. Luther’s own later testimony seems to imply that this came in 1519 during his second exposition of the Psalms. See Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman, 1988), 62. But some scholars date this event to his first exposition on the Psalms, in the Fall of 1514. See E. G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times: The Reformation from a New Perspective* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1950), 286-289.
commentary on the book of Romans (published posthumously in 1552), Luther highlights the various OT passages upon which Paul built his doctrine of justification, as well as stating in a general way that Paul proves his theological points from the OT Scriptures. His lectures on Galatians (both those published in 1519 and in 1535) are filled with citations of OT passages, those utilized by Paul, and many more besides. This study will not attempt to trace the interpretations of various relevant OT passages by the Reformers, but move directly to the OT texts, especially used by the apostle Paul.

We first examine the meaning of the basic Old and New Testament terms for “righteousness” and “justify.”

A. Word study

1. “Righteousness.” In the Hebrew Bible, the basic idea of ts-d-q and its derivatives (410x) is “conformity to a norm” (see, e.g., Gen 38:26; Job 9:15, 20). The Greek root dikaiosynē and its derivatives in the LXX and NT (147x in NT) are largely determined by the Hebrew concept of ts-d-q. In the case of God, His “righteousness” centers in His “covenant faithfulness” (as emphasized by the “New Perspective on Paul”). The biblical terms for “righteousness” often denote His mighty acts in fulfilling the promises and threats of the covenant made with His people (e.g., Judg 5:10-11; 1 Sam 12:7; Neh 9:8; Ps 98:9; Mic 6:5; Zeph 3:5). Since the covenant consists of both blessings and curses (Deut 27-28), it follows that God’s righteousness will include both punitive justice (e.g., Ps 11:6; 129:4; 2 Chron 12:6; Isa 28:17) and salvation (e.g., Ps

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62 I have developed and shown the biblical support for the conclusions in this section in an unpublished paper, “Righteousness—A Word Study.” See also, NIDOTTE s.v., ts-d-q (3:744-769); NIDNTTE (2nd ed.), sv. dikaiosynē, (1:723-741); TDNT, s.v. dik- (2:178-225); Edmond Jacob, Theology of the Old Testament (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 94-102; and Schreiner, Faith Alone, 144-152, 158-178.
The term “righteousness of God” can also be used in a wider ethical sense denoting a general attribute of God’s moral character of right-doing, i.e., doing what is consistent with (in conformity to) His character of love, which involves both justice and mercy (Exod 34:6-7; cf. Ps 31:1; 36:10; 40:10; 71:2; 88:11-12; 143:1; Isa 45:8; 46:13; 51:4-8; Rom 3:5, 25-26). This “righteousness of God” may also denote God’s own righteous moral character, which is imputed to believers as a free gift (Rom 1:17; 3:21-22; 10:3; Phil 3:9; cf. Rom 5:17; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21; and Gen 15:6, as discussed below).

When used in connection with the conduct of persons, the biblical terms for “righteousness” denote the conformity to norms/demands of a particular relationship. Righteousness is entire conformity of attitude and action to the will of God within the covenant relationship (e.g., Ps 82:3; Isa 51:7; Jer 22:3; Ezek 18:5-9; Amos 5:24). Christ, as fully God and fully human, combined both the “righteousness of God” (mighty saving acts and acts of judgment upon sin consistent with His character) and the human righteousness (perfect obedience to God’s law), as illustrated, e.g., in Isa 59:17-19 (cf. Isa 53:11; Rom 5:18, 19; Phil 2:8; Heb 5:8). Christ imputes this righteousness to believers (Rom 5:17; 2 Cor 5:21).

2. “to justify.” The Hebrew word for “justify,” tsadaq in the Hifil stem (hitsdiq), consistently means “to declare righteous” and not “to make righteous” (see Exod 23:7; Deut 25:1; Job 27:5; Prov 17:15; Isa 5:23). The LXX word which translates this term is dikaiōō, and this is also is the NT word for “justify.” Its primary meaning “to declare in the right,” it does not mean

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63 HALOT, sv. tsadaq; B. Johnson, TDOT, sv. tsadaq (12:250).
“to make righteous.”\textsuperscript{64} It is a legal courtroom term to describe the pronouncement of the judge that the one under trial is acquitted, declared in the right.

Part of the confusion over the meaning of this verb for “justify” in the history of the Christian church came because in the Latin Vulgate, which became the dominant translation in Western Christianity, the Greek and Hebrew verbs for “justify” are translated by the Latin term \textit{justificare}, which in its etymology, drawn from Roman culture, meant to \textit{make} just,” and which Augustine interpreted to mean “to make righteous.”\textsuperscript{65} Contrary to the Latin translation in the Vulgate, as articulated by Augustine, the original Hebrew and Greek words for “justify” (both in OT and NT) do not mean “make righteous” but “declare righteous;” they do not speak about the moral \textit{condition} of the person in question, but speak about the \textit{declaration} of the judge that the defendant is acquitted (declared in the right). Luther came to this insight about the year 1518.\textsuperscript{66}

What is the basis upon which the judge can declare the defendant acquitted? For the biblical answer, we go first to the OT material, to the opening chapters of Genesis, to the Abrahamic narratives (esp. Gen 15:6 in its wider context), and to other OT passages upon which the apostle Paul built his doctrine of justification.

\textbf{B. Old Testament passages regarding Justification (especially those cited by Paul)}

\textbf{1. Genesis 1-3: Adam-Christ typology.} In Paul’s sustained treatment of the Adam-Christ typology concerning justification in Rom 5:12-21, he ultimately refers back to the Genesis account of creation and the Fall (Gen 1-3). In what follows we go directly to the opening chapters

\textsuperscript{64} NIDNTTE (2nd ed.), sv. \textit{dikaiosynē}, (1:725, 735).


\textsuperscript{66} George, \textit{Theology of the Reformers}, 69-70.
of Scripture see how Moses introduces the concepts that comprise the message of justification by faith,\(^67\) and then examine the truths which Paul draws from these chapters.

Reading Gen 1-3 in Hebrew, one is struck with the sustained wordplay involving the word 'adam (or with the article ha'adam). In Gen 1:26-27 the word (once with the article and once without) means “humankind”. In Gen 2:18-23 ha'adam (with the article) indicates an individual person, “the man.” In the succeeding verses of Gen 2 and opening verses of Gen 3 it is not clear whether to translate the term (with the article) as “the man” or by the name “Adam” (see the different practices of various modern versions), but by Gen 3:17 (without the article) it clearly constitutes the proper name, “Adam.” In Gen 5:1-2, which recaps human creation at the beginning of the second major section of the book, the same term 'adam (without the article) denotes both the name “Adam” (vs. 1a) and the name of the human race, including both male and female, “Humankind” (vs. 1b, 2). Significantly, throughout the rest of Scripture, no one else is named “Adam.”

By the usage of the term 'adam in the opening chapters of Genesis, it seems apparent that Adam is presented as the representative head in solidarity with the entire human race.\(^68\) Adam bears the name that is also the name of Humankind. Only Adam in OT salvation history is given

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\(^67\) Treatments of justification by faith generally do not focus attention upon the opening chapters of Genesis as already providing the essential contours of the message of justification by faith (albeit without the technical terminology). An exception is MacArthur, “Long before Luther,” 20-21, although his comments are limited to one brief paragraph.

\(^68\) This solidarity indicated by the singular-collective fluidity of the term 'adam also seems underscored by its explicit etymological linkage with the “ground.” In Gen 2:5, 7 the term [ha]’adam (once with and once without the article) denotes the human being who is at first not present to till, and then is formed from, the “ground” (ha’adamah). The linkage between “human” [ha]’adam and “ground” [ha] adamah highlights corporative solidarity because in Gen 2:6-7 “ground” also refers to both localized “dust of the ground” from which Adam was made (vs. 7), and to the universalized “whole face of the ground” (vs. 6; cf. Gen 7:23).] Ellen White supports this interpretation of Adam’s position with regard to humanity. She writes, “Under God, Adam was to stand at the head of the human family. . .” (CT 33). “The Sabbath was committed to Adam, the father and representative of the whole human family.” (PP 48).
this name. Adam the person is in corporate solidarity with the 'adam which is humanity as a whole. This concept of Adam’s solidarity with the human race is developed by Paul in Rom 5 and 1 Cor 15. When Adam sinned, the whole human race (“the many”) were “constituted sinners” (Rom 5: 19). Adam and all subsequent humanity received a sinful nature and legally stood guilty before God.

If Gen 1-3 in general presents Adam as the representative man in corporative solidarity with the human race, the Protoevangelium (“First Gospel Promise”) of Gen 3:15 in particular presents One who is to come as the representative “Seed” of the woman who is in corporate solidarity with the corporate “seed” of the woman. Gen 3:15 appears in a judgment setting, in which God comes for a “legal process,” a “trial,” a “court process.” Gen 3:15 forms the chiastic center of Genesis 3, and introduces the first Gospel promise in the midst of judgment. The final clauses of the verse go to the heart of this promise and shows that it is centered in a Person. God tells the serpent: “He”—the ultimate representative (in dividual) masculine Seed of the woman and her descendants, later to be revealed as the Messiah—“shall bruise your head, [Satan], and you [Satan] shall bruise His [the Messiah’s] heel.

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69 For a succinct and insightful summary of Paul’s usage of the concept of corporate solidarity, see e.g., C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1954), 78-83; and Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 57-64.

70 Many modern versions translate this phrase as “made sinners” but the Greek verb here is *kathistēmi* (aor. pass. 3pl), which in this context means “to be constituted” (see John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICOT [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963], 204-206). Adam and all subsequent humanity receive a sinful nature and legally stand guilty before God.

71 See Ellen White, PP 61: “their [Adam and Eve’s] nature had become depraved by sin”; and 6 BC 1074: “As related to the first Adam, men receive from him nothing but guilt and the sentence of death.”


73 In a penetrating doctoral dissertation, Afolarin Ojewole shows how in this central verse of the chapter the conflict narrows from many descendants (a collective “seed”, Heb. *zera*) in the first part of the verse to a masculine singular pronoun in the last part of the verse—“He”—fighting against the serpent. Elsewhere in Scripture whenever the term “seed” has a singular pronominal referent, it is a single “seed” (i.e. a single individual) who is in view.
The Messianic Seed will take off His sandal, as it were, bare His heel, and step voluntarily on the venomous viper. Christians have rightly viewed this as a picture of the Seed voluntarily giving up His life to slay the serpent, which Rev 12:9 identifies as Satan. The Messiah would volunteer to consciously step on the head of the most deadly viper in the universe, the serpent Satan himself, knowing full well that it would cost Him His life. This is a powerful portrait of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ on behalf of sinful humanity. The implication is that the guilt of Adam and Eve and their seed (descendants) will be imputed to their Representative Seed, the Messiah, and He will bear their penalty on their behalf.74

The prediction in Gen 3:15 is clarified and amplified a few verses later. In Gen 3:21, the record states that God clothed Adam and Eve with skins—implying the sacrifice of animals. In the context of this chapter, the “nakedness” being clothed was not just physical exposure. Adam and Eve had tried to cover their nakedness by the works of their hands, putting on fig-leaf garments which they had made (v. 7). But according to v. 10, when God came to the Garden, Adam still regarded himself as “naked,” even though clothed with the fig leaf garments. The nakedness involved a sense of “being unmasked,”75 a consciousness of guilt and shame, a “nakedness of soul.”76 Therefore, God’s “clothing” of Adam and Eve was not just a covering of their physical

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74 For support of these conclusions, see Ojewole, “The Seed in Genesis 3:15,” 207-213.
75 Claus Westermann, Creation (London: SPCK, 1974), 95.
76 Ellen White, PP 57. It is not often recognized that Genesis 2 and 3 utilize two different Hebrew words for “naked.” In Gen 2:25 the word for “naked” is ‘arom, which elsewhere in Scripture frequently refers to someone not fully clothed or not clothed in the normal manner. In 1 Sam 19:24, for instance, the term is “used of one, having taken off his mantle, goes only clad in his tunic” (Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures, trans. Samuel P. Tregelles [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949], 653). Again, in Isa 20:2 the reference is to one “dressed with śaq only” (KBL, 735; cf. John 21:7). Other passages employ the term in the sense of “ragged, badly clad” (Job 22:6; 24:7, 10; Isa 58:7; Gesenius, 653). Gen 2:25 does not explicitly indicate in what way Adam and Eve were without clothes in the normal sense (“normal” from the post-Fall perspective), but the parallel creation passage

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nudity, but a covering of their guilt and shame. The blood of an innocent victim was shed instead of theirs.  

Here is intimated the Messiah’s substitutionary sacrifice on behalf of guilty humanity who deserved the penalty of death (Gen 2:17). “The instant man accepted the temptation of Satan, and did the very things God had said he should not do, Christ, the Son of God, stood between the living and the dead, saying, ‘Let the punishment fall on Me. I will stand in man’s place.’”

Instead of the fig leaves of their own works with which they unsuccessfully tried to cover their nakedness (Gen 3:7–10), God covered them with the animal skins, symbolizing the Messiah’s “robe of righteousness” (Isa 61:10), righteousness which He imputes to repentant sinners who believe in Him.

In Rom 5:12-21, Paul’s recognition of Jesus Christ as the new Representative Head of the seed of the woman, the antitypical Adam, is ultimately rooted in Gen 1-3, especially 3:15, 21 (as well as echoing Isa 53, which we examine below). By means of four typological comparisons/contrasts, Paul accurately draws the implications for justification by faith: (1) as “the many” died through one man’s sin, so “the many” have grace available to them through the One

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77 In parallel with the burnt offering of Lev 1:5, 11 and the sin offering of Lev 4:29, the human sinners probably slaughtered the sacrificial animal themselves.

78 Ellen White, 1 BC 1085 = Letter 22, Feb 13, 1900.
man, Jesus Christ (v. 15); (2) just as judgment/condemnation came through the one who sinned, the “free gift” of acquittal/justification is available to all through the righteous act of the One Man (vv. 16, 18); (3) as sin/death reigned through the man’s offense, so those who receive the gift of righteousness through the One, Jesus Christ, will reign to eternal life (vv. 17, 21); and (4) as “the many” were “constituted” sinners through one man’s disobedience, so “the many” (who will receive, v. 17b) will be “constituted” righteous (i.e., justified) through One Man’s obedience imputed to them (v. 19).

The opening chapters of Genesis, and the Pauline exposition of these passages, affirm crucial truths about the nature of justification:

- Justification is a judicial declaration of acquittal, the opposite of condemnation (Gen 3:15; Rom 5:16), and not an ethical condition.
- Justification is based upon the external righteousness of Christ, not inherent righteousness of the individual (Gen 3:21; Rom 5:17, 18).
- The sole ground of justification is the substitutionary death of Christ and the imputed merits of His righteousness, not the imparted righteousness of Christ (i.e., sanctification) (Gen 3:15, 21; Rom 5:15, 17, 18, 19).
- Justification is a free gift, not a matter of human works (Gen 3:15, 21; Rom 5:16, 17).

2. Gen 15:6 (and its antecedent contexts). There is probably no more potent biblical statement on justification by faith than that found in Gen 15:6: “And he [Abram] believed in the
Lord, and He [the Lord] accounted [imputed, Heb. *khashab*[^81]] it to him for righteousness.\(^82\) In the NT Paul cites this verse as one of the primary biblical foundations of his doctrine of justification by faith (Rom 4:3, 9, 22).

Abraham is accepted/accounted by Yahweh as righteous as he believes in the Lord. In this verse we have a clear statement of the basic features of the biblical doctrine of justification by faith. First, Abraham was not *made* righteous but was *accounted* righteous; righteousness was imputed to him, not imparted to him. Abraham was not reckoned righteous because of an inherent righteousness: in the chapters that follow Gen 15 it becomes clear that Abraham is no model of righteousness (see his sin in taking Hagar as wife and deceiving Abimelech that Sarah was his sister; Gen 16, 20, 21). Immediately after citing Gen 15:6, Paul boldly states that God “justifies the ungodly” when “his faith is accounted as righteousness” (Rom 4:5). Fleming Rutledge has captured the radical nature of this divine “reckoning”:

Abraham, far from being a model of righteousness, is first and foremost the original justified sinner, the original “ungodly” person who is reshaped by God into godliness, not because of his own deeds but because of the God who does the unimaginable thing—the God who justifies, rectifies, redeems, and remakes the *least* acceptable, most *un*-godly person.\(^83\)

Secondly, Abraham was accounted righteous *not because of his works*. After citing Gen 15:6, Paul rightly points out that “now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but which we are involved in his sin, obtains in our relation to Christ. And just as the relation to Adam means the imputation to us of his disobedience, so the relation to Christ means the imputation to us of his obedience.”

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[^81]: HALOT, sv. *khashab*.

[^82]: Some scholars have suggested that Abraham is the subject throughout this entire verse; i.e., “Abraham believed the Lord and [Abraham] reckoned it (i.e., what the Lord had promised) to him (a manifestation of his) righteousness. But, as pointed out by B. Johnson (*TDOT*, s.v. *tsadaq* [12:254]), “Elements militating against this view include especially the consecutive verb form and the divine name immediately before the verb “and he reckoned,” where “he” can more naturally refer to God.”
as debt” (Rom 4:4). Paul also notes the chronology of the narrative flow, that Abraham was accounted righteous (justified) in Gen 15, before he performed the work of circumcision described in Gen 17 (Rom 4:9-12). Abraham was justified before he worked!

Third, Abraham appropriated righteousness by faith alone. The Hebrew construction in Gen 15:6, a ‘aman in the Hifil plus the preposition be, indicates that Abraham not just gave intellectual assent to Yahweh and His promises, but that he relationally “put his trust in” the Lord.84 He entered into a personal intimate trust-relationship with God. Abram’s trust in Yahweh was not meritorious. Note the fragility of Abram’s faith. Immediately after Abram’s lofty statement of faith in God’s promise that he will inherit the land (Gen 15:6), Abram asks God, “How will I know that I will inherit it?” (v. 8). In this chapter He is still Abram, not Abraham. His name-change, signifying his development of character has not taken place; he has yet several striking experiences ahead of him that reveal his lack of mature faith. But God accepts him where he is. His faith, feeble though it may have been, was the instrument, the “empty hands” which grasped the promises Yahweh had made about his future seed.

With grammatical precision, the NT writers later confirm, in discussion of this and related OT passages, that faith is only the means or instrument, not the ground or agent, of justification.85

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84 In the HB, the expression ‘aman (Hifil) plus the preposition le, “believe [to],” often implies only giving intellectual assent to something/someone, “regarding something [or someone] as trustworthy” (HALOT, sv. ‘aman; cf. Exod 4:8-9; 1 Kgs 10:7; Isa 53:1; Ps 106:24; Prov 14:15; 2 Chron 9:6), whereas the same verb with the preposition be, as we have in Gen 15:6, usually expresses the added relational idea of “having trust in” (ibid; cf. Exod 14:31; Num 14:11; 20:12; Deut 1:32; 2 Kgs 17:14; Jon 3:5; Ps 78:22; 2 Chron 20:20).
85 See esp. the discussion by Beeke, “Justification by Faith Alone,” 53-105. Regarding Gen 15:6, Paul (Rom 4 and Gal 3:6-14) makes clear that this verse does not support the notion that God reckons righteousness to Abraham because of some kind of creaturely merit in his faith (as we find claimed in Catholic theology), but as a free gift of God. When Paul states that God reckoned his faith “for Gk. eis] righteousness (Rom 4:5, 9, 22) the preposition eis does not denote “in the stead of” (implying it is the ground of righteousness), but “with a view to” or “toward”
Some proponents of the “New Perspective on Paul” argue that the Pauline phrase *pistis Christou* (lit. “the faith of Christ”), should not be taken as an objective genitive (the believer’s “faith in Christ”) with regard to justification, as the Reformer’s took it, but rather as a subjective genitive (a reference to “Christ’s faith or faithfulness”). While this is a possible translation in some passages (e.g., Rom 3:22; Gal 2:16; cf. the NET) it is nonetheless clear from these very verses that the believer’s own “faith in Christ” is the instrument of justification. Gen 15:6 leaves no doubt that it is Abram himself who believes in God, and that his faith is counted as righteousness; and Paul’s commentary on this passage in Rom 4:4 is unambiguous: “But to him who believes in [pres. act. ptp. of *pisteuō + epi*] Him who justifies the ungodly his faith is accounted for righteousness” (ESV).

Fourth, that which was imputed to Abram for righteousness is focused on the object of Abram’s faith—Yahweh’s promise of the coming Messianic Seed who would die a substitutionary death for the sins of the world and impute His righteousness to penitent sinners (implying it was the occasion and means of receiving the free gift of God’s righteousness) (ibid., 55-56). The three different Greek expressions in Paul’s writings on justification translated as “by faith” also do not ever imply that faith is the ground of receiving righteousness. Romans 3:28 uses *pistei* (pistos in the dative) speaks of the “necessity and importance of faith.” Romans 5:1 has *ek* [“from, out of, by”] *pisteos*, which “describes faith as the occasion of justification” but not its ultimate cause. Ephesians 2:8 uses *dia* [in the dative, “through, by means of”] *pisteos*, “describes faith as the instrument of justification”. The Bible writers never use *dia* with the accusative (*dia ten pistin* to describe faith, which would mean “on the ground of” or “on account of” and imply that faith was the ground of the righteousness (ibid., 58-60). Beeke concludes, “Yet such is the precision of the Holy Spirit’s oversight of the New Testament Scriptures that nowhere does any writer slip into using this prepositional phrase” (ibid., 60).

These verses not only use the phrase *pistis Christou* but also clearly speak of a person’s faith in Christ as the instrument of justification: “we have believed in [pisteuō + eis] Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified” (Gal 2:16 NASB); “to all who believe” (Rom 3:22). For discussion on whether to translate *pistis Iēsou Christou* (“faith of Jesus Christ”) as an objective genitive “faith in Jesus Christ” or as a subjective genitive “faithfulness of Jesus Christ,” with the main arguments on either side, see, e.g., Schreiner, *Faith Alone*, 124-132, who favors the traditional reading of “faith in Jesus Christ.” Both readings are grammatically possible, and Paul may mean one in one context and the other in a different context, or even both may be implied in some cases. It need not be an either-or; both Christ’s faithfulness and the believer’s faith are involved in justification. But the overall Pauline message is unambiguous that the Gospel calls for faith on the part of the believer in Jesus Christ for justification (e.g., Gal 2:16).
who received the gift in faith. In the grammar of Gen 15:6, there is no antecedent noun for the pronoun “it” in the clause “He accounted/imputed it for righteousness. The “it” encompasses the object of Abraham’s faith: the promise of seed (Heb. zera’) mentioned in the previous verse (Gen 15:5), which, according to earlier chapters of Genesis, as we have seen above, includes the substitutionary death of the Promised Messianic Seed on behalf of the sinful race, and the imputation of His righteousness to repentant sinners. Based upon the Protoevangelion of Gen 3:15, 21, the promise of the coming Seed extends throughout the Genesis narratives dealing with the life of Abraham, revealing the basis upon which God can count Abraham’s faith as righteousness. It is already intimated in Gen 12:3 (“in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed”), but made more explicit in Gen 15.

After Abram believed in the Lord and His promises (Gen 15:6), but then wavered in His faith (v. 8), Yahweh graciously condescended to enter into a covenant with Abram of the kind that was understood in Abraham’s day so that he could understand the message of the gospel of justification in the sacrificial imagery. Picture a scene somewhat repulsive to us of modern minds, and yet fraught with deep significance. A heifer three years old, a three-year old goat, and a three-year old ram, a turtledove and a young pigeon—all in the peak of health, slain with stroke of the slaughter knife. The larger animals are cut in two down the middle, and each half laid beside the other, and the birds, left whole are laid opposite one another, with room for someone to pass through the row of paired carcasses.

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87 See also how for Paul also (e.g., Rom 4:17) “What makes faith salvific is the object of faith” (Schreiner, Faith Alone, 122), specifically focusing upon God’s promises of salvation in the Messiah, faith in Jesus Christ (ibid., 124-132).

88 See Ellen White, PP 137.
The vultures come down to eat the pieces, but Abram drives them away. The sun sets. A deep sleep settles upon the man who has slain the animals and separated their parts. The sleep is followed by a dread and great darkness. All is silence and blackness. Suddenly out of the darkness appears a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch. The fire pot and torch slowly pass between the pieces of the dead animals. The ceremony is complete. (See Gen 15:9–18.)

What does it all mean? Moses explicitly states in Gen 15:18 that on this day “The Lord made [Hebrew karat] a covenant with Abram.” Throughout the Bible when it is stated (in English) that God “made” a covenant, the Hebrew word for “made” is generally karat, literally, “cut.” This expression of “cutting” a covenant refers to the common practice in ancient Near Eastern times of making a covenant by cutting a sacrifice and walking between the pieces. In Jer 34:18-19 we find a reference to this practice still in use in Jeremiah’s day. God says to those in Judah who broke the covenant they made with the Lord: “And I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not performed the words of the covenant which they made [karat] before Me, when they cut [karat] the calf in two and passed between the parts of it—the princes of Judah, the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf. . .”

In the ancient Near Eastern treaties, when a suzerain (overlord) entered into a treaty/covenant with a vassal (servant state), he would regularly have them cut a sacrifice and pass through the pieces. What is important for us to note here is what the vassal was in effect acknowledging by passing through the pieces: “May it be done to me as was done to this animal if I am unfaithful to the covenant.”
We have numerous illustrations of this practice in the ancient Near East, with the king saying in effect to the vassal, “if you do not remain faithful to the covenant, it will happen to you as to this animal.” The one passing through the pieces, by so doing indicates that he will undergo similar dismemberment if he is unfaithful to the covenant.

It was expected for the vassal to pass through the pieces and in effect make this kind of dismemberment oath. Note that in Jeremiah 34 it was the people that passed through the pieces. But in the ceremony described in Genesis 15, there is no mention that Abram passed through the pieces. The point emphasized is that, radically contrary to ancient Near Eastern practice, where only the vassal and not the suzerain moved through the pieces, God Himself, the Divine Suzerain or Overlord, passed through the pieces! The reference to the smoking oven and the burning torch are symbols of the divine presence, reminiscent of the smoking fire on Mt Sinai. The same two

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89 Note, for example, the covenant made by the Assyrian king Assur-nerari V with the vassal Mati’-ilu. After Mati’-ilu divides a lamb, Assur-nerari V says: “This head is not the head of a spring lamb, it is the head of Mati’-ilu, it is the head of his sons, his nobles (and) the people of the land. If Mati’-ilu should sin against this treaty, just as the head of this ram is cut off, . . . so may the head of Mati’-ilu be struck off.” Kenneth A. Kitchen and Paul J. N. Lawrence, Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East, Part I: The Texts (Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), 940-941; cf. James Pritchard, ed., Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 532-534. For discussion and further examples, see Victor P. Hamilton, The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 430-434.

90 Even though this is not explicitly mentioned, the possibility of Abram’s passing through the pieces is not totally eliminated by the text. The vassal’s vow of obedience was expected in the ancient Near Eastern covenant pattern, and Abram’s action would also be parallel with Israel’s vow to be obedient in the making of the Mosaic covenant (Exod 19:5-8; 24:6, 7.) If Abram passed through the pieces, this would not negate Paul’s argument (Gal 3:15-18) that the covenant of promise given to Abraham (which was really the content of Gen 12, coming before Gen 15, and was totally promissary!) preceded the covenant of obligation given to Israel through Moses some 430 years later. God’s original intention was simply to give ten (covenant) promises to Abraham (eight are found in Gen 12:1-3, and two more in Gen 17:6-7), based upon the eternal covenant between the Father and the Son in eternity (cf. Gen 3:15; Isa 42:6; Zech 6:13; Rev 13:8), but because of Abram’s lack of faith (see Gen 15:8), “The Lord condescended to enter into a covenant with His servant, employing such forms as were customary among men for the ratification of a solemn engagement. By divine direction, Abraham sacrificed a heifer, a she-goat, and a ram, each three years old, dividing the bodies and laying the pieces a little distance apart. To these he added a turtledove and a young pigeon, which, however, were not divided. This being done, he reverently passed between the parts of the sacrifice, making a solemn vow to God of perpetual obedience.” (Ellen White, PP 137). By focusing only upon mysterious climax to the
Hebrew words connoting the divine presence link these two events together: “smoke” 'ashan (Genesis 15:17; Exodus 19:18; 20:18) and “lamp” lapid (Genesis 15:17; Exodus 20:18).

Why two symbols of the divine presence in Gen 15? I believe it is significant that both a smoking oven and the burning torch passed through—two divine light sources, symbolizing the Father and the Son. Over and over in the narratives recorded in Genesis and Exodus we find the Angel of the Lord who is both sent from Yahweh, and yet saying of Himself, “I am Yahweh.”

There is the implication of two divine beings in the Godhead involved in these narratives. Likewise, both the Father and Son appeared at Mt. Sinai, and we can conclude that both Father and Son were involved in the covenant-making ceremony with Abraham. The poignant truth of Gen 15 is that as the Father and the Son pass through the pieces of the sacrifices, Divinity is saying, in effect, “If we break our promise of the covenant, then let the Godhead be dismembered, let Divinity be ripped from divinity, as these pieces.” In effect, the Father and Son were placing their very existence and unity on the line in this oath of covenant loyalty! That’s how sure is the Gospel promise of the covenant!

What is even more amazing is that Abram and his descendants did break the covenant, and instead them being dismembered, the Godhead stepped into their place and took the covenant curses in their stead (Gal 3:10-13). The choice of the animals that Abram was to sacrifice is instructive, as these are the very animals that were at the heart of the sacrificial system in Leviticus. They point to the substitutionary sacrifice of the Messiah taking the place of us sinners.

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91 Cf. Gen 16:7–11 with vs. 13; 18:1 with vv. 2, 33, and with 19:1; 31:11 with v. 13; 32:24, 30 with Hos 12:3–6; 48:15, with v. 16; Exod 3:2 with vv. 4, 6, and 7; and 13:21 with 14:19.
The linkage of Genesis 15 with the Servant Song of Isaiah 53 is revealed in a striking way. The Hebrew word for the “[cut off or separated] pieces [of a slaughtered animal]” that the divine Presence passed through in Gen 15:17, is from the root gzr, and this root appears again in the Hebrew Bible in a sacrificial context only in Isa 53:8: “he was cut off [gzr] from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.” By using this rare word for being sacrificially “cut [off],” Isaiah links the divine passing through the pieces in Gen 15 with the death of the Messiah. Thus is revealed the substitutionary atonement, and the imputation of the guilt of the world to the Suffering Servant.

Daniel 9:26-27 further links the Messiah’s death with the cutting of the covenant portrayed in Gen 15. According to the prophecy in the midst of the week the Anointed One (Messiah) would be “cut off.” The Hebrew verb karat (in the Niphal passive) “to be cut off” is the technical term in the Pentateuch for the death penalty, and even more, implies a death penalty with no prospect of a future life,93 i.e., the equivalent of the “second death.” The same Hebrew verb karat also is the technical term in Scripture for the making (literally “cutting”) of a covenant. The Hebrew word here means “cut off” in (the second) death and also implies the making (“cutting”) of a covenant. The Messiah was cut off” (died, the equivalent of the second death, since He could not see through the portals of the tomb) to ratify the new/everlasting covenant with His blood (Matt. 26:28; Heb 13:20). This is the same word as found in Gen 15:18 for God’s making (literally “cutting”) of the covenant.

92 Ellen White, Evangelism, 616.
For the ultimate fulfillment of this covenant-making service in Genesis 15, alluded to also in Isaiah 53 and Daniel 9—to see the ultimate depth of the gospel—we must go to Calvary. On the cross we hear Jesus’ anguished words, as He takes upon Himself the covenant curses that we deserved: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt 27:46). In light of God’s implied oath of Self-dismemberment in Genesis 15, this takes on incredible meaning. Ellen White points out that on the cross, as Jesus became the Sin-bearer, the unity of the Father and Son was broken up and Jesus felt the anguish of eternal separation from His Father.94

In terms of Genesis 15, as it were, God was ripped from God! Deity was torn from deity! Divine dismemberment took place so that we might live! Christ took our curses (Gal 3:13) as our Representative, Substitute and Surety, suffering the agony of eternal separation between God and man that we deserved, so that we might have the covenant blessings of eternal life which He deserved. That is the heart of justification by faith: the imputed guilt of the world placed upon Christ, and the imputed gift of righteousness offered to all repentant sinners who will reach out and take it with the hand of faith.

So in Gen 15, when Yahweh promises to multiply Abram’s seed like the stars of the heavens, and illustrates it by making a covenant with Abram, implicit in that promise and covenant was the prediction of the Messianic Seed from Gen 3:15, 21. When Abram “believed in Yahweh” and it was imputed to him for righteousness, Abram’s faith grasped the promise of the coming of the Messiah to bear the sins of humanity by penal substitution, and to impute to the believer His righteousness.

This is made even more explicit in Gen 22, a passage to which Paul also refers.

94See esp. Ellen White, DA 686, 753–4; FLB 101; AG 170–171.
3. Genesis 22. The narrative of Genesis 22, describing the divine test of Abraham in asking him to offer up Isaac on Mt. Moriah, may be the very apex of OT gospel prefigurations, revealing in advance how both the Father and Son were to be involved in the anguish of the atoning sacrifice. Jesus remarked that “Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad (John 8:56). When did Abraham see Jesus’ day? Paul records that “Scripture . . . preached the Gospel to Abraham” (Gal 3:8), and the text cited by the apostle to prove this point is from Gen 22:18: “In your Seed shall all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.”

In Gen 22:16–18 we encounter the same movement as in Gen 3:15, narrowed from the collective “seed” of Abraham’s many descendants (v. 17a), to the singular Seed, the coming Messiah, who will “possess the gate of His enemies” and Him “all nations of the earth shall be blessed” (vv. 17b–18; the pronoun modifying “seed” here is singular “His”, although some versions have mistranslated by a plural “their”). By this paralleling of Isaac with the Messiah (vv. 16, 18) the narrator Moses makes clear that Isaac is a prefiguration of Christ. Thus the whole incident in this chapter is a depiction in advance of the Father’s offering up of His “only” Son, His beloved son (v. 2), Jesus, to die for the world.95 Bruce Waltke summarizes some of the typological correspondences:

Within the canon of Scripture, the story of Abraham’s willingness to obediently sacrifice his son of promise typifies Christ’s sacrifice. Abraham’s decision that “God Himself will provide the Lamb” (22:8) resonates with God’s offer of the Lamb to save the world (Mark 10:45; John 1:29, 36; 2 Cor 5:17–21; 1 Pet 1:18–19). God’s provision of the ram on Mount Moriah typifies his sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Ultimately God provides the true Lamb without blemish that stands in humanity’s place. . . . Like Isaac, Christ is a Lamb led to the slaughter, yet he does not open his mouth. Just as Isaac carries his own wood for the altar up the steep mount, Christ carries his own wooden cross toward Golgotha (see John 19:17). . . .

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Abraham’s devotion (“You have not withheld from me your son, your only son”) is paralleled by God’s love to us in Christ as reflected in John 3:16 and Rom. 8:32, which may allude to this verse. Symbolically, Abraham receives Isaac back from death, which typifies Christ’s resurrection from the death of the cross (Heb 11:19).96

Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son, and his son Isaac was willing to die. The anguish depicted in this scene gave those in OT times “with eyes to see” a faint glimpse of the anguish to be experienced by the Father in not sparing His Son, and of the Son in dying the death that we deserved. But in this passage, the Angel’s voice spares Abraham from actually carrying out this sacrifice, and Abraham saw “a ram caught in a thicket by his horns” (v. 13a). This verse contains the first explicit mention in Scripture of substitutionary sacrifice of one life for another:

“So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of [Heb. takhat] his son” (v. 13b).

The Apostle Paul seems to have lingered long over Genesis 22 when he writes “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Rom 8:31, 32, emphasis supplied). The Greek word for “spared” (pheidomai) here in Rom 8 is the same one as used in the LXX of Gen 22:12: “Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld [spared] your son, your only son.”97

Here is the basis for our justification. Here is a typological picture of the sinner Isaac, representing all of us, deserving to die, but the sacrificial Lamb/Ram is offered in His place. Isaac

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figuratively is raised from the dead (Heb 11:19), by virtue of the innocence of the Sacrifice who
died in his place. Indeed, on Mt. Moriah Abram saw the Gospel of Justification by faith!

All of this foundational material from the early chapters of Genesis lies behind Paul’s
doctrine of justification by faith. Informed by these chapters and later OT materials, Paul
systematically argues for the penal substitutionary death of Christ for the sins of the world (e.g.,
Rom 3:21-26; 4:24-25 [echoing Isa 53:6, 11-12]; 5:8-10; 8:1-3; Gal 3:10-13),98 and the
imputation of His righteousness to those who believe (e.g., Rom 4 [esp. v. 3]; 5:12-21 [esp. v. 19];
and 2 Cor 5:12-21 [esp. v. 21]).99 We will return to these Pauline passages again below.

4. The typology of the sanctuary. The precincts, furnishings, and services of the
sanctuary, as described in the Pentateuch, teach the truths of justification by faith in numerous
ways.100 We can only give some representative examples. According to Lev 4,101 the repentant
sinner comes with his sin offering, lays/leans his hands on the head of the innocent animal, and

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98 For exegesis of the major biblical passages supporting penal substitution, see esp. Steve Jeffery, Michael
Ovey, and Andrew Sach, Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution (Wheaton,
IL: Crossway, 2007); Norman R. Gulley, Christ Our Substitute (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), and
Angel Rodriguez, Substitution in the Hebrew Cultus (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1982). For
particular treatment of Pauline passages, see Simon Gatherocole, Defending Substitution: An Essay on Atonement in
Paul (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015).

99 For exegesis of these Pauline passages supporting imputation, see esp. Brian Vickers, Jesus’ Blood and
Righteousness: Paul’s Theology of Imputation (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006); John Piper, Counted Righteous in
Christ: Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness? (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002); and
Schreiner, Faith Alone, 182-189; and D. A. Carson, “The Vindication of Imputation: On Fields of Discourse and, of
Treier (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 46-78.

100 Note the insightful comment by Clowney (“Biblical Doctrine of Justification by Faith, 28-29): “There are
not two alternate ways of being accepted by God, but there are two figures by which acceptance is expressed: the
verdict of God and the blessing of the priest. Both are found in the New Testament. In Romans, the language of the
law-court is used to describe our justification; in Hebrews the language of the sanctuary includes the same truth.” In
this paper we focus upon the law-court imagery (especially in our treatment of NT material), but in this section we
focus upon examples of sanctuary typology which teach the same truths.

101 For further discussion of Lev 4, see, e.g., Richard M. Davidson, Song for the Sanctuary (Berrien Springs,
MI: Andrews University Press, forthcoming), chap. 12; and Roy E. Gane, Cult and Character: Purification Offerings,
Day of Atonement, and Theodicy (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 45-213.
confesses his sin. Symbolically his sin is transferred to the sacrifice. Then the sinner kills the animal with his own hand. The blood is carried by the priest to the Holy Place and sprinkled before the veil (or a part of the sacrifice is eaten by the priest and blood sprinkled upon the horns of the altar of burnt offering). The sacrifice is burned upon the altar of burnt offering. After the priest has made atonement for him concerning his sin, “it shall be forgiven him” (Lev 4:31). Thus, the blood of the substitute has made atonement (Lev 17:11). The sinner is forgiven, pardoned, declared righteous by God by virtue of the substitute that has been offered and in harmony with his heartfelt repentance and confession of sin. Here is taught in type the glorious truth of justification by faith—God’s acceptance of the repentant sinner just as if he had not sinned by virtue of the Substitute.

Again, the altar of burnt offering reveals central truths of justification by faith. On this altar the Substitute in type is burned as a sweet savor to God—Christ is typified as satisfying divine justice as He pays the penalty for sin, enduring the fires of God’s wrath in the sinner’s stead. God can therefore be both just and the Justifier of the believing, repentant sinner (Rom 3:25-26). The ashes signify a final end, the acceptance of the offering.

The foundational sacrifice of the Levitical system was the “continual” (or “regular,” Heb. tamid) burnt offering, the offering for which the altar in the sanctuary courtyard was named

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102 For a discussion of the accounted, declared righteousness, involved here, refer to Hans LaRondelle, Perfection and Perfectionism (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1971), 127–128. See also Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 1:247-248, 261-262. Instead of these “declaratory formulae” being recited by the priest, however, as La Rondelle and von Rad suggest, the Niphal (passive) verb suggests that these were “divine passives” declared by Yahweh himself.

103 For details of construction, see Exod 27:1–7; 38:1–7.

104 See Ps 73:17—the Psalmist sees the “end” of the wicked, in the ashes; Ps 20:3 has the offering “accepted,” literally “reduced to ashes.”

105 White, Selected Messages, vol. 1, 343-344.
(Exod 31:9; Lev 4:30; etc.). A one year-old male lamb offered every morning and every evening (Num 28:3–8), and this daily offering of two lambs was not only to be done regularly (Num 38:3), but the offering was to be kept burning continually night and day upon the altar (Lev 6:9–13). The regular/continual burnt offering is a vivid portrayal of Israel’s “constant dependence upon the atoning blood of Christ.” No matter how advanced was the worshiper’s sanctification, he/she was never beyond need of the atoning blood of Christ to cover his/her sinfulness. Thus is taught the Reformation truth of simul justus et peccator—at the same time justified and a sinner.

Justification is not merely something to be experienced at the beginning of the Christian life, but it is constantly retained by Christians as the basis of their salvation. “Christ as high priest within the veil so immortalized Calvary that though He liveth unto God, He dies continually to sin, . . . Christ Jesus is represented as continually standing at the altar, momentarily offering up the sacrifice for the sins of the world. . . . All incense from earthly tabernacles must be moist with the cleansing drops of the blood of Christ.” We can never this side of eternity get above the necessity for the continual justifying atonement provided by Jesus’ blood.

In the Holy Place, the altar of incense occupied a position nearest the Most Holy Place, directly before the veil. The incense itself points unmistakably to the “merits and intercession of Christ, His perfect righteousness which through faith is imputed to His people, and which can

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106 The word tamid can mean either “regular” or “continual,” depending upon the context. In Num 28:3 it seems to emphasize the regularity of the burnt offering, thus translated in the NKJV as “regular [tamid] burnt offering.” In Lev 6:13 the term seems to imply the continual burning of the sacrifice on the fire, thus translated by the NKJV as “perpetual [tamid] fire.”
107 White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 352.
108 White, Selected Messages, 1:343–344.
alone make the worship of sinful beings acceptable to God.”

If one views the court of the sanctuary as the dimensions of two squares, each square contains an altar: the eastern square has the altar of burnt offering and the western square the altar of incense. Two altars, one of “perpetual intercession,” the other of “continual atonement.”

Blood and incense—one presents the efficacy of Christ’s death as a Substitute for man, the other presents the efficacy of Christ’s merits (or righteousness) that is imputed to the believing sinner. Both are interconnected. The horns of the altar of incense are stained with the blood of the sin offering. The altar of incense gives off its fragrance that infuses the smoke from the brazen altar, and perfumes the camp for miles around. Only by virtue of Christ’s substitutionary death can He be qualified to apply His merits in our behalf. And at the same time, only by virtue of His spotless, incense-filled life of righteousness, was He qualified to die in our stead.

As a final example from sanctuary typology, we refer to the ark covered by the mercy seat in the Most Holy Place. The ark, the “most sacred object” of the sanctuary, contained the Decalogue, the basis of the covenant between God and man. The law was the expression of God’s character; it was love codified. But it pronounced death upon the transgressor. The consequence of sin is separation from God, non-existence, death. Above the ark was the Shekinah glory, the visible manifestation of the presence of God. Humans, as transgressors of God’s law, could

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110White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 353. Revelation 5:8; 8:3 and Ps 141:2 reveal the mingling of this incense with the prayers of the saints. Numbers 16:47 adds the insight that incense provided atonement for the people.

111Ibid.

112Ibid., 348.

113Ellen White, Signs of the Times (4 March 1903). The ark was the first article of furniture mentioned in God’s instructions to Moses regarding the sanctuary: Exod 25:10–22.

114The word “Shekinah” is a rabbinic term not used in Scripture, though often employed by Ellen White (PP 349; PK 18, etc.). It is the “glory of the Lord” that was enthroned above the mercy seat, between the cherubim (Ps 80:1). It filled the sanctuary after it was completed and set up by Moses (Exod 40:34, 35), as it later filled the Temple
never stand in the presence of God. The justice of God in dealing with sin could only be satisfied by the death of the sinner. But the ark reveals the way in which God, in His infinite wisdom and love, could be both “just and justifier” of repentant sinners (Rom. 3:26). The mercy seat 
(kapporeet) came between the Law and the Presence of God. Christ, by virtue of the atonement can grant pardon to the repentant sinner and still be just.115 Here at the mercy seat, in symbol, “mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Ps 85:10). Paul grasped the profound meaning of this typology, and proclaimed Christ as our “Mercy Seat”—our hilastērion (Greek translation of kapporeet)—put forward by God to reveal His righteousness in dealing with sin, and to make it possible for Him to be both “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom 3:25-26).116

5. Psalm 32:1–2 and related passages. Another major OT passage used by Paul to teach justification by faith is found in Psalm 32:1-2: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute [charge his account with] iniquity [‘does not hold guilty,’ NJPS], and in whose spirit there is no guile.”

The Hebrew word for “impute” is the same as in Gen 15:6—khashab—which means “to impute, reckon to”. Psalms 32 indicates that God does not “impute iniquity/guilt,” but rather “covers” our sin, implying that God imputes righteousness to us apart from our works.
Paul cites this verse in Rom 4:5-8, highlighting this very understanding:

But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.”

In Rom 3:10-18, Paul cites a whole catena of OT passages to show that all humanity stands “under sin” (Rom 3:9) and “guilty before God” (Rom 3:19), and thus there is no way that their justification can be based upon their works of the law:

As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one” [Ps 14:1-3 = 53:1-3]. “Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit” [Ps 5:9]; “The poison of asps is under their lips” [Ps 140:3]; “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness” [Ps 14:7]. “Their feet are swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery are in their ways; And the way of peace they have not known” [Prov 1:16; Isa 59:7, 8]. “There is no fear of God before their eyes” [Ps 36:1].

Paul’s citation of these passages (and other references to the sins of both Jews and Gentiles in Rom 1-3) is not primarily ecclesiological (as claimed by the “New Perspective” on Paul), but profoundly ontological and soteriological: “both Jews and Greeks. . .are under sin” (Rom 3:9). Although there are ecclesiological implications, the fundamental problem of the people of Israel was not their failure to bless the world, but their inherent sinfulness (an ontological problem). All humanity stands guilty before God because they have failed to obey God and keep His law.117

While the “New Perspective” on Paul rightly points to elements of grace in first-century Judaism, nonetheless the evidence is strong both within the Pauline corpus and other extant

117 For further discussion with biblical evidence, see esp. Schreiner, Faith Alone, 244-249.
literature of the period that Judaism, despite its “covenant nomism,” commonly involved a legalistic strain in which one earned salvation by works of law. Likewise, the references to “works” (Rom 4:2, 4, 6; 11:6; Eph 2:9; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 3:5) and “works of the law” (Rom 3:27; 9:32; Gal 2:16; 3:10) in the Pauline writings dealing with justification, are not limited to the particular “ethnic markers” of Judaism (boundaries between Jews and Gentiles), as claimed by proponents of the “New Perspective,” but refer to all attempts on the part of humanity to keep the law in order to be saved.

Finally, these and other OT passages, and their NT counterparts, also make clear that true believers, justified persons, are still sinners, and can never have a standing before God based upon their own works of righteousness, even after conversion through those works wrought in them by the Holy Spirit. In the words of Martin Luther, we are ever simul justus et peccator (“at the same time just and sinner”).

Many additional biblical passages make this abundantly evident. Yahweh states after the Flood: “the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth” (Gen 8:21 NRSV). “David exclaims: “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (Ps 51:5).

118 See, esp. D. A. Carson, Mark A. Seifrid, and Peter T. O’Brien, eds., Justification and Variegated Nomism: Volumes 1-2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001, 2004). See the comment in Moisés Silva, ed., NIDOTTE (2014), s.v., dikaiosynē: “It would be naïve, however, to think that in mainstream Jud., and partic. In the popular imagination, good deeds were not regarded as meritorious. . . .Although there was no well-defined and consistent doctrine on the subject among the rabbis, the evidence suggests that, in the minds of many, merits were indeed weighed against demerits, and that those who had accumulated a preponderance of the former were deemed righteous” (1:730).

119 See, e.g., Schreiner, Faith Alone, 249-252; Waters, Justification and the New Perspective, 158-170. Waters shows how, e.g., in Rom 11:5-6, Paul “contrasts grace and works in such a way that they are mutually exclusive” so that “works” cannot be taken in an ethnic sense but must mean “anything that human beings do” (ibid., 159). Waters also examines other Pauline passages regarding “works” in relation to justification (Rom 4:4-6; 9:30-32; 10:5; Phil 3:2-11; Titus 3:5; Eph 2:9; 2 Tim 1:9; Gal 3:10-13; 5:3-4) with the same conclusion that “works” in these passages do not refer to Jewish identity markers, as claimed by proponents of the “New Perspective,” but to “human activity,” and in the Jewish context, “Jews’ efforts to achieve a state of righteousness by the activity of obedience to the law” (158-159).
Again, David confesses: “no one living is righteous before you” (Ps 143:2). In his prayer at the dedication of the Temple, Solomon acknowledged, “There is no one who does not sin” (1 Chron 6:36). He reiterates this same point in Eccl 7:20: “There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.” Isaiah states regarding all humanity, even the faithful ones in Israel: “But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags” (Isa 64:6). Jeremiah states regarding human nature: “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jer 17:9). Examples of godly individuals in the OT, such as Noah, Job, and Daniel, who are called “righteous” or “blameless” (Ezek 14:14, 20; cf. Gen 7:1; Job 1:1; Dan 9:23), are described as either having committed sin or as confessing sin (Gen 9:21; Job 40:4; 42:2-6; Dan 9:4-19). In the NT, Paul asserts that “all have sinned [aorist punctiliar = sins of the past], and fall short [present continuous, ‘continue to fall short’] of the glory of God” (Rom 3:22).

No matter how advanced one’s character development may be, one is still a sinner. Paul frankly acknowledged: “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am [present tense] chief” (1 Tim 1:15).

120 See also the typology of the high priest’s miter/turban in Exod 28:38, where high priest is said to “bear the iniquity/guilt of the holy things which the children of Israel hallow in all their holy gifts.” As Tim Arena comments, “It is not willful sin or acts of rebellion against God that the high priest is said to be bearing (though of course these are included elsewhere) when he [יְוֹן נַשְׁא] bears the iniquities of the Israelites. It is rather said to occur when they are offering their ‘holy gifts’—that is, in all of their participation in the sanctuary service—there is iniquity which must be borne and atoned for even when they are doing what God has asked them to do. All human beings are sinful even when they are doing what God has asked them to do, because all have sinful, defiled natural depravity from birth that taints everything (Ps. 51:5; Eph. 2:3; Gen. 8:21; Prov. 22:15; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 7:14-23).” Timothy J. Arena, “The Holy Attire of the High Priest and His Role in Bearing Guilt: An Exegetical Examination of Exodus 28:29-38,” unpublished paper, Andrews University Theological Seminary (2016), 12.
6. Isaiah 53. We return once more to Isa 53, where one finds arguably the most profound statement on justification by faith in the OT, a chapter to which the NT writers, including Paul, return again and again.121

At the heart of Isaiah 53 are the intertwined themes of penal substitution and forensic justification—that the Messianic Servant paid the legal penalty of our transgressions, to make atonement for us in order that we might escape punishment, and to justify us (declare us righteous) by bearing our sins. 122 All of the major elements involved in the biblical doctrine of justification are found in this chapter: (1) the Servant was sinless and righteous (vv. 7, 9, 11); (2) all of us are sinners, having gone astray and turned to our own way (vv. 5-6); (3) the guilt/punishment of our sins was imputed to Him, as “the Lord laid on Him the iniquity [Heb. ‘awon, ‘guilt,’ NJPS] of us all” and “He was numbered [LXX logizomai ‘reckoned’] with the transgressors (vv. 4–6, 8, 11–12); (4) He suffered and died for “all,” an unlimited atonement making justification available to everyone (vs. 6; cf. 52:12); (5) God (the Father) Himself acted to


lay our iniquity/guilt upon the Servant and to punish Him for those sins, according to the principle of *lex talionis* (just retribution), thus satisfying His justice (vss. 6, 10); (6) the Righteous Servant suffered willingly and deliberately (vv. 4, 11, 12); (7) He became a “guilt offering” (Hebrew *'asham*) to make atonement for our guilt (vs. 10; cf. Lev 5–7); (8) the voluntary suffering/death of the Righteous Servant “will justify the many as He will bear their iniquities;” his righteousness will be imputed to them (v. 11); (9) the need for the response of faith is highlighted in Isaiah’s rhetorical question at the beginning of the chapter: “Who has believed our report?” (thus also implying that not everyone would believe, v. 1); and (10) the work of the Servant in justifying sinners is accompanied by the work of sanctification (“healing”) in the believer, although this is distinct from and not part of justification (v. 5).

Several points above call for further comment. Note especially point no. 8 above. After Isaiah’s focus upon the Messiah’s substitutionary sacrifice, he indicates in the final stanza of the Song that the substitutionary sacrifice of the Messiah forms the basis of His work of justification, by placing the two items in poetic synonymous parallelism:

> By His knowledge [Heb. *da’at*, His personal experience] My righteous Servant shall justify [Heb. *hitsdiq*, Hifil of *tsadaq*, ‘declare/pronounce righteous”] many; He shall bear their iniquities (v. 11).

The reference to “My Righteous Servant” in this verse also implies that the Servant’s righteousness is imputed to sinful humanity. Paul alludes to this verse in Romans 5:19, and several other verses in Isa 53 (vv. 5, 6, 8, 10, 12) “provide a compelling and meaningful backdrop to Paul’s thought” in Rom 5:12-21.123

Paul also alludes to these verses in Isa 53 (and also ultimately to creation-fall-redemption in Gen 1-3) in 2 Cor 5:12-21 (esp. v. 21). The creation connection is found in 2 Cor 5:17:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. . . .” We saw at the beginning of our biblical study that according to Gen 1-2 Adam was the Representative Head of creation, and when he fell, all humanity was constituted sinners. Likewise, Gen 3:15, 21, implicitly teach that Christ is the New Adam, the Representative Head of the new creation, who took upon Himself the sins of humanity, died in our place, and imputes His righteousness to the contrite sinner.

These ideas, already nascent in the opening chapters of Scripture, are crystalized in Isa 53, and developed further by Paul in 2 Cor 5:12-21. In v. 14, Paul states that “if One died for all, then all died.” Christ died as our Representative, as our Substitute, having our sins imputed to Himself. Further, he became our Righteousness, imputing His righteousness to us (v. 21): “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Murray Harris succinctly summarizes: “it is not inappropriate to perceive in this verse a double imputation: sin was reckoned to Christ’s account (v. 21a), so that righteousness is reckoned to our account (v. 21b). . . . As a result of God’s imputing to Christ something extrinsic to him, namely sin, believers have something imputed to them that was extrinsic to them, namely righteousness.”

N. T. Wright (representing the “New Perspective” on Paul) rejects the imputation of Christ’s righteousness as unbiblical, largely because he “contends that in a courtroom when the

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124 For further discussion of 2 Cor 5:12-21 and its teaching of the imputation of sin to Christ and of His righteousness to the believer, see, e.g., Piper, Counted Righteous in Christ, 68-69; Schreiner, Faith Alone, 186-188, 258-259; Waters, Justification and the New Perspective, 177-179.
judge declares the defendant to be righteous, he doesn’t give his righteousness to the defendant.”

But Wright is judging the divine courtroom by what he knows of human courtrooms! As Schreiner states regarding the heavenly courtroom:

> But we see the distinctiveness of the biblical text and the wonder and glory of the gospel precisely here. God is not restricted by the rules of human courtrooms. This is a most unusual courtroom indeed, for the judge delivers up his own Son to pay the penalty. That doesn’t happen in human courtrooms! And the judge gives us his own righteousness—a righteousness from God (Phil 3:9).

Note also point no. 9 regarding Isa 53. At the beginning of the chapter the prophet implies the need to respond to His “report” of the Messiah’s work by “faith”: “Who has believed our report?” (v. 1). Thus, at the end and at the beginning of Isa 53, like bookends, we have “justification” and “faith.”

In regard to these two points (nos. 8 and 9 above), some have questioned whether our justification is only a legal fiction, if it always is based on an “alien” righteousness of the Messiah, if it always is based on an “alien” righteousness of the Messiah, if it always is based on an “alien” righteousness of the Messiah,

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125 Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 455.

126 Schreiner, *Faith Alone*, 180. Wright writes: “If Paul uses the language of the law court, it makes no sense whatever to say that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfer his righteousness either to the plaintiff or the defendant” (*What Saint Paul Really Said*, 98). Again, “The judge has not clothed the defendant with his own ‘righteousness.’ That doesn’t come into it. Nor has he given the defendant something called ‘the righteousness of the Messiah’—or, if he has, Paul has not even hinted at it. What the judge has done is to pass judicial sentence on sin, in the faithful death of the Messiah, so that those who belong to the Messiah, though in themselves ‘ungodly’ and without virtue or merit, now find themselves hearing the law court verdict, ‘in the right’ (Wright, *Justification*, 206).

127 Schreiner, *Faith Alone*, 260. Schreiner aptly points out (ibid., 259) that “Wright leads us astray when he says that because justification is a legal declaration, it is not based on one’s moral character. . . .Wright fails to state clearly the role that moral character plays in justification, and because he separates moral character from the law court, he fails to see the role that Christ’s righteousness plays in imputation. When a judge in Israel declared a person to be innocent or guilty, he did so on the basis of the moral innocence or guilt of the defendant [Deut 25:1]. . . .The fundamental question is how God can declare sinners to be righteous. . . .The answer of Scripture is that the Father because of his great love sent his Son, who willingly and gladly gave himself for sinners, so that the wrath that sinners deserved was poured out upon the Son (cf. Rom 3:24-26). God can declare sinners to be in the right because they are forgiven by Christ’s sacrifice. God vindicates his moral righteousness in the justification of sinners since Christ takes upon himself the punishment and wrath sinners deserve.” Wright claims that his view of “representation” is adequate to accomplish what the traditional view of imputation seeks to express, but these need not be exclusive, as we have
and is granted by only by faith to those who are still sinners. This is a major argument of Roman Catholic theology against forensic (only) justification.  

After all, it is pointed out, the OT strongly condemns those who “justify” (Heb. ḥitsdiq) the wicked: “He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, both of them are alike an abomination to the Lord” (Prov 17:15; cf. Exod 23:7; Deut 25:1).

However, to speak of God’s acquittal of the guilt of sinners in justification is not a legal fiction, for two crucial reasons. First of all, the term ḥitsdiq “to declare righteous” speaks of the declaration of the judge, not the moral state of the one being judged. It is a real declaration of acquittal/pardon, not a fictional one. Second, it is not a legal fiction, nor opposed to the biblical statements quoted in the previous paragraph, because it is a real righteousness (that of Christ), not a fictional one, which is imputed to the believer. As R. C. Sproul puts it:

The forensic declaration of justification is not a legal fiction. It is real and authentic because the imputation upon which it is based is no fiction. It is a real imputation of real righteousness of a real Christ. Christ is our righteousness. . . . He gives us His righteousness before the tribunal of God. Our righteousness remains as filthy rags. We must be adorned or cloaked by His righteousness, a cloak which covers the nakedness of our sin. This is the truly good news of the Gospel that by grace God counts or reckons the very righteousness of Christ to us.

Because Christ has taken our iniquities, the covenant curses that we deserved, He the Righteous one, can truly put to our account His infinite righteousness, and as we, “the many,” accept Him in

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128 Sproul summarizes the Catholic view: “Rome rejects this notion of imputed forensic justification on the grounds that it involves God in a ‘legal fiction.’ This casts a shadow on the integrity of God and His justice. They claim that for God to consider someone just who is not inherently just is for God to be involved in some sort of fictional deceit. Rome cannot tolerate Luther’s dictum, simul justus et peccator. For Rome a person is either just or sinner, one cannot be both at the same time. For Rome only the truly just can ever be declared to be just by God.” (Sproul, “The Forensic Nature of Justification,” 37-38.

129 Ibid., 39.
faith, He justifies [accounts/declares righteous] “the many” [i.e., all who trust in Him]! Christ is indeed the embodiment of Jer 23:6: “The Lord our Righteousness.”

Finally, we must comment further on point no. 10 above in our discussion of Isa 53. The atoning work of Christ brings not only justification (a judicial declaration of pardon, receiving Christ’s imputed righteousness) but also “healing” (v. 5), an internal transformation (the imparted righteousness of Christ, which the NT calls sanctification). Both of these gifts from Christ the Righteous One flow to the repentant sinner who “believes” the report of Christ’s work and accepts Him as their Savior. While these two gifts of grace cannot be separated, they must be distinguished. Many passages in Scripture illustrate this point: see, e.g., Isa 53:1-5, 11; Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17; 5:1-5; 1 Cor 6:11; Eph 2:8-10; and Titus 3:5-8.

When one accepts Christ by faith, is united to Him, that person is both justified (legally pardoned) and sanctified (regenerated) at the same time (with sanctification also an ongoing process). But the two actions of justification and sanctification must be distinguished. The basis of our justification is always the *imputed* righteousness of Christ (what Christ has done for us, outside of us), which is perfect and acceptable to God, not His *imparted* righteousness (what He is doing in us, sanctification), which is always partial, always “falls short” of the glory of God, and can never commend us to God. Only on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ, can we have peace—assurance of salvation.

Paul makes this clear in Romans 5. According to v. 1, “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Justification is by faith alone, and peace is based upon this legal declaration of God accepted by faith. At the same time, vv. 2-5 are
also true, describing the work of sanctification in our lives that flows from this justification: “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (v. 5).

The biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone is sometimes viewed with suspicion because if it is by faith alone, it seems like one is opening the door to antinomianism. But the Bible never teaches that justification is a form of “cheap grace” removing the importance of obedience to God’s law. Justification is not opposed to, nor to be separated from sanctification, in terms of experience. Isa 53 makes clear that the Servant both “justifies” (justification) and “heals” (sanctification) those who believe in Him. John Gerstner aptly remarks:

> Faith is not a work, but it is never without work. . . . If a believer is not changed, he is not a believer. No one can have Christ as Savior for one moment when he is not Lord as well! We can never say too often: “Justification is by faith alone, but NOT by the faith that is alone.” Justification is by a WORKING faith.130

In his epistles (esp. Romans and Galatians) Paul clearly affirms the points described above, that justification describes the imputed righteousness of Christ (based on His sinless life) which is placed to our account by faith alone, not by works (see esp. Rom 3:20-31; 4:3-5, 22-25; 5:1, 12-21; 10:3-10; Gal 2:16-17; 3:5-14, 24; Titus 3:5-7). Yet Paul also makes clear that this justifying faith is a deep and active faith which is demonstrated by how we live (Gal 5:6; cf. Col 1:4; 1 Thess 1:3; 2 Thess 1:11; Rom 1:5; 5:1, 5; 16:26; Tit 3:7-8). It is this latter point which is emphasized by the apostle James (James 2:21-25), when he writes that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:20). Paul and James are not opposed to one another. Paul is emphasizing that justification is by faith alone, while James is emphasizing that justifying faith is never alone.131

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Both apostles agree that our faith includes our disposition to be willing to act in accordance with God's will. Jesus also teaches the doctrine of justification by faith, providing the same balance between faith and works that is found in Paul and James (see, e.g., Luke 18:9-14; Matt 12:36-37). The biblical texts throughout Scripture are numerous which show that humans are justified by faith alone, but also that works of faith provide evidence to the universe in the final eschatological judgment of acquittal (sometimes called “final justification”) that the faith of those justified is genuine.

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132 See esp. MacArthur, “Jesus and the Doctrine of Justification,” 1-22. MacArthur states that “Although Christ made no formal explication of the doctrine of justification (such as Paul did in his epistle to the Romans), justification by faith under lay and permeated all His gospel preaching. While Jesus never gave a discourse on the subject, it is easy to demonstrate from Jesus’ evangelistic ministry that He taught sola fide” (15). MacArthur points to Jesus’ statements that “he who hears My word and believes. . . has passed out of death unto life” (John 5:24), and the experience of the thief on the cross (Luke 23:24) who did no work to procure justification. He further points to Jesus’ various healings where states that “your faith has made you well” (Matt 9:22; cf. Mark 5:34; 10:52; Luke 8:48; 17:19; 18:42). But there is one passage—Luke 18:9-14—where “Jesus actually declared some ‘justified’” and this passage provides the best insight into the doctrine as He taught it” (16). MacArthur shows how the basic features of the doctrine of justification by faith are present in this parable of the Pharisee and tax-collector’s prayers (these are my own arranging of his points): (1) it is by faith alone, as the Pharisees “trusted in themselves that they were righteousness” (v. 9), while the penitent tax-collector simply threw himself upon God’s mercy and went away justified without performing any works; (2) it is an instantaneous judicial pronouncement of God, not a process; (3) the tax-collector acknowledged his unrighteousness, and that even his best works were sin; (4) he went home justified, implying that the righteousness of Another had been imputed to him (as in Phil 3:9; Rom 4:9-11); and (5) justification was essentially forgiveness or pardon of the sinner (ibid., 16-20). At the same time, Jesus also uses the term “justification” for the time of the final judgment when all will be justified according to their works (see esp. Matt 12:36-37 and the next footnote). For further discussion of the role of faith in salvation according to Jesus, the Gospel writers, and Acts, see Schreiner, Faith Alone, 113-120.

133 There is not space in this study to deal extensively with the role of obedience as an evidence of the genuineness of one’s faith in the final eschatological judgment. I have dealt with this in a paper entitled “Final Justification according to Works: Is N.T. Wright Right?” presented at the ETS Annual Convention, 19 November 2010. There are some Pauline passages which seem to refer to the acquittal at the final judgment using the term “justification,” and this “final justification” is according to works (see esp. Rom 2:13: “for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified [dikaiothēsontai, from the verb dikaioō]”). Jesus also speaks of the final judgment as “justification”: “But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified [dikaiothēsē], and by your words you will be condemned.” (Matt 12:36-37) Scores of passages in Pauline writings and elsewhere in Scripture indicate that the final judgment will be “according to works” (see, Davidson, “Final Justification according to Works,” 4-10, where I cite some thirty passages in the writings of Paul, some twenty passages elsewhere in the NT, and some twenty-five representative OT passages). Ivan Blazen summarizes well my own conclusion: “The Bible teaches that justification belongs to the ‘last things,’ for it brings the hoped-for verdict of acquittal in the last judgment into the present. . . .Though the blessing of acquittal in the future judgment indeed becomes operative even now,
7. **Hab 2:4.** In his introduction to the epistle to the Romans, Paul cites Hab 2:4: “The just shall live by faith” (Rom 1:17). Scholars have struggled to understand whether Paul intends this quotation to refer only to his treatment of justification by faith (concentrated in the first half of his epistle), or sanctification (the focus of the last half of his epistle). The word for “faith” in the Hebrew of Hab 2:4 is *‘emunah*, which can mean “faith” or “faithfulness.” Recent study has shown from the immediate context in Habbakuk that the OT prophet intended to include both meanings in his statement. The OT passage teaches justification by faith AND that the justified are faithful. Paul no doubt grasped this two-fold implication of the OT passage, and used this verse to be the introduction to his entire epistle, to encompasses both the concept of justification by faith (first half of the book) and sanctifying faithfulness on the part of those who are justified (second half of the book), and probably also ultimately to underscore the Messiah’s own faith/faithfulness as the basis of both our justification and sanctification.

Scripture is clear that what God desires to see in the final judgment is justified believers who through His grace have born fruit to His glory. . . . The new history God gives each believer is not over when he comes to Christ and is justified; it is just begun. At the end God asks for justification with its fruit—*not in the sense of the formula ‘Faith plus works saves, ‘* but in the sense that justification is the source of sanctified fruit. . . . The cross is the means by which justification is effected; faith is the means by which justification is accepted; and good works are the means by which justification is manifested. Works of righteousness [in the final judgment] testify to the reality and vitality of justification.”

Ivan T. Blazen, “Justification and Judgment,” in *The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 339-388 (citations, 364, 387). In the final judgment, works of faith in the life of the Christian provide the evidence that his faith is genuine. However, the ultimate ground of one’s acceptance in the judgment is not the believer’s Spirit-enabled works, but the righteousness of Christ. Blazen emphatically concludes: “While the character of Christ can be imitated and approximated, the infinite character of His goodness can never be equaled. Consequently, two things must remain true for the [final] judgment: (1) the sanctified fruit of justification must be present, but (2) justification itself must continue its function of pardon” (ibid., 367).

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134 HALOT, sv.’emunah.


136 See A. Rahel Wells, “Did the Reformers Misunderstand Righteousness by Faith? Reflections on Habakkuk 2:4b,” paper presented at the ATS Annual meetings, Boston, MA, Nov 18, 2017. The citation of Hab 2:4 by Paul does not precisely follow either the Hebrew text or the LXX. It appears that Paul not only wishes to capture the two meanings just mentioned—justification by faith and the faithfulness of the justified, but also to indicate that
The great doctrine of justification by faith is a message that brings peace and hope and eternal life to the one who is justified. When the contrite sinner reaches out and receives the gift of justification by faith, he/she finds peace and hope (Rom 5:1) and can have full assurance of faith that he/she has eternal life (Rom 10:9, 10; Tit 3:7; cf. John 6:47; 1 John 5:13). It is indeed “the justification of life” (Rom 5:18)!

IV. Conclusions and Implications

The brief survey of the biblical materials reveals that the doctrine of justification by faith, as taught by the Reformers, has a solid basis in Scripture, both OT and NT. The following conclusions and implications emerge from our biblical study.

1. Justification by faith is of crucial importance, as “the article of our true standing in the sight of God” (Job 9:2; Rom 3:21-26). The question of one’s standing before God, how one is justified by Him, is the most crucial question faced by human beings; it is foundational to all other questions.

according to the original meaning of Habakkuk, it is the Messiah’s own faith/faithfulness which is the ultimately the basis of both our justification and our sanctification.

137 We have seen above that the traditional view of justification upheld by the Reformers has in general been confirmed by examining the biblical evidence. Ellen White attests that “The great doctrine of justification by faith” was “clearly taught by Luther” (GC 253). This is not to deny that new insights into this doctrine have been forthcoming since the sixteenth-century Reformation. In this paper we have had occasion to interact briefly with the claims of the “New Perspective on Paul,” specifically concerning the aspects of the traditional Reformation view on justification which are rejected by proponents of this perspective. In sum, we have found that the “New Perspective” rightly provides broader context to the doctrine of justification, but we have also seen that this perspective is often problematic in what is rejected from the traditional view, which usually results from “false polarities” that are drawn. See esp. Schreiner’s summary of Wright’s three main false polarities (Faith Alone, 244): “First, he wrongly says that justification is primarily about ecclesiology instead of soteriology. Second, he often introduces a false polarity when referring to the mission of Israel by saying that Israel’s fundamental problem was its failure to bless the world whereas Paul focuses on Israel’s inherent sinfulness. Third, he insists that justification is a declaration of God’s righteousness but does not include the imputation of God’s righteousness.” Each of these “false polarities” has been briefly treated in our discussions above (and see ibid., 243-261).

138 In the footnotes (and occasionally in the main text) of this conclusion we cite sample passages from Ellen White’s writings that emphasize the various points which have emerged from the Scriptures regarding justification.
2. Justification may be defined as a judicial declaration of acquittal or pardon (Gen 3:15; Isa 53:11; Luke 18:9-14; Rom 4:3-5; 5:16; cf. Exod 23:7; Deut 25:1; Job 27:5; Prov 17:15; Isa 5:23).\textsuperscript{140} It does not include the process of ethical transformation. It is an \textit{accounting or reckoning} a person righteous (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3-6), not \textit{making} a person righteous.

3. Justification is based upon an \textit{external} (“alien”) righteousness, not \textit{internal} (inherent) righteousness in the believer (Gen 3:21; Isa 53:11; Luke 18:9-14; Rom 4:5-6; 5:17-18; 2 Cor 5:21). It does not include an actual righteousness inhering in the believer because of which he or she is declared righteous.\textsuperscript{141}

4. The only ground of justification is the imputed merits of Christ’s righteousness, based upon His sinless life and His substitutionary death for our sins (Gen 3:15, 21; 15:6, 9-

\textsuperscript{139} Ellen White, Ms 91, 1899.

\textsuperscript{140} Ellen White often defines justification in terms of “pardon.” Of the more than 50 references, here is a sample: “As the penitent sinner, contrite before God, discerns Christ's atonement in his behalf and accepts this atonement as his only hope in this life and the future life, his sins are pardoned. This is justification by faith” (FW 103). “Justification is a full, complete pardon of sin. The moment a sinner accepts Christ by faith, that moment he is pardoned. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to him, and he is no more to doubt God's forgiving grace” (FLB 107; 6BC 1071; ST, May 19, 1898 par. 11).” “When God pardons the sinner, remits the punishment he deserves, and treats him as though he had not sinned, He receives him into divine favor, and justifies him through the merits of Christ's righteousness” (NL 20). “Pardon and justification are one and the same thing” (6BC 1070). Ellen White also defines justification in more general terms: “What is justification by faith? It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself. When men see their own nothingness, they are prepared to be clothed with the righteousness of Christ.” (FLB 111). Again, “The great work that is wrought for the sinner who is spotted and stained by evil is the work of justification. By Him who speaketh truth he is declared righteous. The Lord imputes unto the believer the righteousness of Christ and pronounces him righteous before the universe. He transfers his sins to Jesus, the sinner's representative, substitute, and surety. Upon Christ He lays the iniquity of every soul that believeth. He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” 2 Cor. 5:21” (FLB 112).

\textsuperscript{141} “Pardon and justification are one and the same thing. Through faith, the believer passes from the position of a rebel, a child of sin and Satan, to the position of a loyal subject of Christ Jesus, \textit{not because of an inherent goodness}, but because Christ receives him as His child by adoption. The sinner receives the forgiveness of his sins, because these sins are borne by his Substitute and Surety. The Lord speaks to His heavenly Father, saying: ‘This is My child. I reprieve him from the condemnation of death, giving him My life insurance policy—eternal life—because I have taken his place and have suffered for his sins. He is even My beloved son.’ Thus man, pardoned, and clothed with the beautiful garments of Christ's righteousness, stands faultless before God.” (RC 74.3; 9MR 301, emphasis
The law demands perfect righteousness (obedience to the law), and the only way sinners can meet the law’s requirements is through the perfect righteousness of Christ which is imputed to them.142

5. Justification is not a legal fiction (Gen 3:15; Isa 53:11; 61:10; Jer 23:6; 2 Cor 5:12-21). Christ really died as our Representative and as the Substitute for the sins of the world. The real righteousness of Christ is truly imputed to the repentant and believing sinner, and that sinner is really declared justified (pardoned).143

6. Justification is by faith alone, not by faith plus works (Gen 15:6; Isa 53:1; Rom 3:10-18, 28; 4:4, 9-12, 25; 10:10; Gal 2:16-17; 3:5-14, 24; Tit 3:5-7); but faith is never alone supplied).

142 “Righteousness is obedience to the law. The law demands righteousness, and this the sinner owes to the law; but he is incapable of rendering it. The only way in which he can attain to righteousness is through faith. By faith he can bring to God the merits of Christ, and the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner's account. Christ's righteousness is accepted in place of man's failure, and God receives, pardons, justifies, the repentant, believing soul, treats him as though he were righteous, and loves him as He loves His Son. This is how faith is accounted righteousness” (1SM 367). “It is the Father's prerogative to forgive our transgressions and sins, because Christ has taken upon Himself our guilt and reprieved us, imputing to us His own righteousness. His sacrifice satisfies fully the demands of justice” (FW 103-104). “It is the righteousness of Christ that makes the penitent sinner acceptable to God and works his justification. However sinful has been his life, if he believes in Jesus as his personal Saviour, he stands before God in the spotless robes of Christ's imputed righteousness” (FW 106). “Through the imputed righteousness of Christ, the sinner may feel that he is pardoned, and may know that the law no more condemns him, because he is in harmony with all its precepts. It is his privilege to count himself innocent when he reads and thinks of the retribution that will fall upon the unbelieving and sinful. By faith he lays hold of the righteousness of Christ. . . . Knowing himself to be a sinner, a transgressor of the holy law of God, he looks to the perfect obedience of Christ, to His death upon Calvary for the sins of the world; and he has the assurance that he is justified by faith in the merit and sacrifice of Christ. He realizes that the law was obeyed in his behalf by the Son of God, and that the penalty of transgression cannot fall upon the believing sinner. The active obedience of Christ clothes the believing sinner with the righteousness that meets the demands of the law.” (SD 240)

143 It is true that there is language of “as if” and “as though”: “Sinners can be justified by God only when He pardons their sins, remits the punishment they deserve, and treats them as though they were really just and had not sinned, receiving them into divine favor and treating them as if they were righteous” (OHC 52). But this does not make justification a “legal fiction.” “Having made us righteous through the imputed righteousness of Christ, God pronounces us just, and treats us as just. He looks upon us as His dear children” (FLB 112). We are truly “made righteous,” even though not inherently, because Christ’s righteousness has truly been imputed to us, and God treats us
While justification is by faith alone, the faith by which one is justified is never alone; it is a working faith. Justifying faith is not merely an intellectual assent to Christ and His promises, but a putting one’s trust in Him. It is a deep and active faith which is demonstrated by how we live.\textsuperscript{144} At the same time, no works that we perform, even our most fervent obedience wrought through the power of the Holy Spirit, can in any way become the basis of our acceptance with God.\textsuperscript{145}

7. The faith by which we are justified is itself a gift of God, and earns no creaturely merit (Gen 15:6; Rom 3:28; 4:1-8; 12:3; Eph 2:8-9). Faith is simply the “empty hands”\textsuperscript{146} that receive the gift of Christ’s righteousness.\textsuperscript{147} It is in no way meritorious.

\textsuperscript{144} Some interpret the following statement to mean that justification includes transformation of heart as well as a declaration of acquittal/pardon: “God’s forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness for sin, but reclaiming from sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart” (MB 114; emphasis original). However, the context of this passage is Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, and Ellen White comments on Jesus’ statement “Forgive us our sins; for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us” (Luke 11:4), making the point that “we can receive forgiveness from God only as we forgive others” (MB 113). White is not saying that justification include faith plus works, but only that justifying faith is a working faith. One cannot receive forgiveness (justification) without at the same time receiving a forgiving spirit (sanctification).

God’s justification (pardon) is not cheap grace, leading to antinomianism or a life of cherished sin. Ellen White is clear: “But while God can be just, and yet justify the sinner through the merits of Christ, no man can cover his soul with the garments of Christ's righteousness while practicing known sins, or neglecting known duties. God requires the entire surrender of the heart, before justification can take place; and in order for man to retain justification, there must be continual obedience, through active, living faith that works by love and purifies the soul. {1SM 366.1} 

\textsuperscript{145} “Let the subject be made distinct and plain that it is not possible to effect anything in our standing before God or in the gift of God to us through creature merit. Should faith and works purchase the gift of salvation for anyone, then the Creator is under obligation to the creature. Here is an opportunity for falsehood to be accepted as truth. If any man can merit salvation by anything he may do, then he is in the same position as the Catholic to do penance for his sins. Salvation, then, is partly of debt, that may be earned as wages. If man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be wholly of grace, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is wholly a free gift. Justification by faith is placed beyond controversy. And all this controversy is ended, as soon as the matter is settled that the merits of fallen man in his good works can never procure eternal life for him.” (FW 19-20)

\textsuperscript{146} For the phrase “empty hands of faith,” see, e.g., Ellen White, ST, Aug 19, 1897, par. 14. This phrase is also used often by the Reformers (see above).
8. Justification and Sanctification cannot be separated, but must be distinguished

(Isa 53:1-5, 11; Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17; 5:1-5; 1 Cor 6:11; Eph 2:8-10; Titus 3:5-8). 148 Numerous biblical passages speak of justification and sanctification in the virtually same breath, but the inspired biblical writers nonetheless clearly distinguish between the two.

147 "There is nothing in faith that makes it our saviour. Faith cannot remove our guilt. Christ is the power of God unto salvation to all them that believe. The justification comes through the merits of Jesus Christ - He has paid the price for the sinner's redemption. Yet it is only through faith in His blood that Jesus can justify the believer.” (FLB 107). “Faith is the condition upon which God has seen fit to promise pardon to sinners; not that there is any virtue in faith whereby salvation is merited, but because faith can lay hold of the merits of Christ, the remedy provided for sin. Faith can present Christ's perfect obedience instead of the sinner's transgression and defection. When the sinner believes that Christ is his personal Saviour, then, according to His unfailing promises, God pardons his sin, and justifies him freely. The repentant soul realizes that his justification comes because Christ, as his substitute and surety, has died for him, is his atonement and righteousness” (ISM 366-367).

148 Ellen White writes that “Many commit the error of trying to define minutely the fine points of distinction between justification and sanctification. Into the definitions of these two terms they often bring their own ideas and speculations. Why try to be more minute than is Inspiration on the vital question of righteousness by faith?” (FLB 116; 6 BC 1072). Some take this quotation as supporting a definition of justification that includes sanctification, thus blurring the distinction between the two. But the context of this passage (found in its entirety in Ms 21, 1891 [Feb 27, 1891] published as 9MR 293-302) is Ellen White’s caution directed towards those who had not attended the full ministerial Bible School session in 1891, and who expressed “fear that there was danger of carrying the subject of justification by faith altogether too far, and of not dwelling enough on the law” (9MR 293). In response to these fears, White wrote: “Judging from the meetings that I had been privileged to attend, I could see no cause for alarm; and so I felt called upon to say that this fear was cherished by those who had not heard all the precious lessons given, and that therefore they were not warranted in coming to such a conclusion” (ibid.). Immediately after stating her caution against some trying to “define minutely the fine points of distinction between justification and sanctification,” Ellen White proceeds to give one of her most profound portrayals of the nature of justification and its relation to sanctification. “As the penitent sinner, contrite before God, discerns Christ's atonement in his behalf, and accepts this atonement as his only hope in this life and the future life, his sins are pardoned. This is justification by faith. Every believing soul realizes that his justification comes because Christ, as his substitute and surety, has died for him, is his atonement and righteousness” (ISM 366-367).  

Pardon and justification are one and the same thing. Through faith, the believer passes from the position of a rebel, a child of sin and Satan, to the position of a loyal subject of Christ Jesus, not because of an inherent goodness, but because Christ receives him as His child by adoption. The sinner receives the forgiveness of his sins, because these sins are borne by his Substitute and Surety. The Lord speaks to His heavenly Father, saying: 'This is My child. I reprieve him from the condemnation of death, giving him My life-insurance policy--eternal life--because I have taken his place and have suffered for his sins. He is even My beloved son.' Thus man, pardoned, and clothed with the beautiful garments of Christ's righteousness, stands faultless before God. 

The sinner may err, but he is not cast off without mercy. His only hope, however, is repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the Father's prerogative to forgive our transgressions and sins, because Christ has taken upon Himself our guilt and reprimed us, imputing to us His own righteousness. His sacrifice satisfies fully the demands of justice.

Justification is the opposite of condemnation. God's boundless mercy is exercised toward those who are wholly undeserving. He forgives transgressions and sins for the sake of Jesus, who has become the propitiation for our sins. Through faith in Christ, the guilty transgressor is brought into favor with God and into the strong hope of life eternal.” (9 MR 301-302).
9. The righteousness by which one is justified is imputed (Gen 15:6; Ps 32:1-2; Isa 53:11; Rom 4:3, 7-9, 22; 5:1, 12-21; 2 Cor 5:12-21), whereas the righteousness by which we are sanctified is imparted (Exod 31:13; Lev 22:9, 16; Ezek 20:12; 37:28; Rom 5:2-5; 6:13-19; Eph 4:24; Phil 1:9-11; 1 Thess 4:3-8). Justification, as the judicial verdict of acquittal before God, is the believer’s legal claim or title to heaven (Rom 5:9, 21; Eph 2:8), while sanctification is the (ever-developing, ever incomplete) fitness for heaven (1 Thess 5:23). The obedience of faith (sanctification) is evidence to the universe in the end-time judgment (sometimes called “final justification”) that the faith of those justified is genuine (e.g., Matt 12:36-37; Rom 2:13). But our sanctification is always progressive, always partial; it always “falls short” of the glory of God (Rom 3:23), and can never commend us to God.

10. Both justification and sanctification flow from the sinner’s union with Christ, by placing one’s trust in Him, giving oneself to Him, accepting Him as one’s Saviour (Gen 15:6; Rom 6:1-23; 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 1:13; 2:4-9; Col 1:27; cf. John 15:1-8; 1 John 5:11-13). Justification is not a forensic heavenly verdict that is disconnected from an intimate union with

149 “The righteousness by which we are justified is imputed; the righteousness by which we are sanctified is imparted. The first is our title to heaven, the second is our fitness for heaven.” (FLB 116; RH June 4, 1895.) Some have taken the following statement from Ellen White as implying that part of the ground for our salvation is Christ’s imparted righteousness: “Our only ground of hope is in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and in that wrought by His Spirit working in and through us” (SC 63). But the context is describing justification and sanctification, and the preceding paragraphs make clear that the only basis for our justification is Christ’s imputed righteousness: “If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned” (SC 62). The next paragraph describes the work of sanctification: “More than this, Christ changes the heart. . . .” (ibid.). The work of the Holy Spirit in transforming our lives is evidence that our justification by faith is real, and thus gives us hope (see Rom 5:1, 2), but it is never the basis of our justification, because our works, even done in the power of the Holy Spirit, always “fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23) and need the covering blood of Christ’s atonement mingled with the incense of His righteousness (1 SM 344, see below).

150 Note how Ellen White’s classic statement on justification and sanctification (without using those terms, cited below), begins: “if you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then. . . .” (SC 62). This is
Christ; rather the justification flows from that mystical union with Christ established by faith.\textsuperscript{151}

Neither is sanctification separated from one’s union with Christ, but flows spontaneously from the believer’s connection with the Savior.

11. Those who are justified by faith may have continued full assurance of salvation in Christ their Substitute, as they maintain their connection with Him (Rom 5:1, 18; 10:9, 10; Eph 1:6; Titus 3:7; cf. John 6:47; 1 John 5:13). “We are not to be anxious about what Christ and God think of us, but about what God thinks of Christ, our Substitute. Ye are accepted in the Beloved.”\textsuperscript{152} We may “give ourselves to Christ and know that He accepts us.”\textsuperscript{153}

12. Since we are \textit{simul justus et peccator} (“at the same time just and sinners”) till our glorification (1 Chron 6:36; Ps 14:1-3, 7; 36:1; 140:3; 143:2; Prov 1:16; Eccl 7:20; Isa 53:5-

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\textsuperscript{151} “Through the provision Christ has made by taking the punishment due to man, we may be reinstated in God's favor, being made partakers of the divine nature. If we repent of our transgression, and receive Christ as the Life-giver, our personal Saviour, we become one with him, and our will is brought into harmony with the divine will. We become partakers of the life of Christ, which is eternal. We derive immortality from God by receiving the life of Christ for in Christ dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. This life is the \textit{mystical union} and cooperation of the divine with the human.” (ST June 17, 1897, par. 14 [italics supplied]; cf. \textit{Maranatha} 302).

\textsuperscript{152} 2 SM 32-33. We may “give ourselves to Christ and \textit{know} that He accepts us” (COL 155; emphasis supplied). Through the imputed righteousness of Christ, the sinner \textit{may feel} that he is pardoned, and \textit{may know} that the law no more condemns him, because he is in harmony with all its precepts. It is his privilege to \textit{count himself innocent} when he reads and thinks of the retribution that will fall upon the unbelieving and sinful. By faith he lays hold of the righteousness of Christ. . . . Knowing himself to be a sinner, a transgressor of the holy law of God, he looks to the perfect obedience of Christ, to His death upon Calvary for the sins of the world; and he has the \textit{assurance that he is justified by faith in the merit and sacrifice of Christ}. He realizes that the law was obeyed in his behalf by the Son of God, and that the penalty of transgression cannot fall upon the believing sinner. The active obedience of Christ clothes the believing sinner with the righteousness that meets the demands of the law” (SD 240).

\textsuperscript{153} COL 155 (emphasis supplied). “Through the imputed righteousness of Christ, the sinner \textit{may feel} that he is \textit{pardoned}, and \textit{may know} that the law no more condemns him, because he is in harmony with all its precepts. It is his privilege to \textit{count himself innocent} when he reads and thinks of the retribution that will fall upon the unbelieving and sinful. By faith he lays hold of the righteousness of Christ. . . . Knowing himself to be a sinner, a transgressor of the holy law of God, he looks to the perfect obedience of Christ, to His death upon Calvary for the sins of the world; and he has the \textit{assurance that he is justified by faith in the merit and sacrifice of Christ}. He realizes that the law was obeyed in his behalf by the Son of God, and that the penalty of transgression cannot fall upon the believing sinner. The active obedience of Christ clothes the believing sinner with the righteousness that meets the demands of the law” (SD 240; emphasis supplied).
6; 59:7-8; 64:6; Rom 3:10-22; 4:5; 1 Tim 1:15), we are in constant need of justification for our pardon and atonement in our sinful state (Exod 30:1-10; 25:10-22; Lev 6:9-13; Zech 3:1-5; Rom 3:23, 25-26; 8:34; Heb 7:25). Justification is not a one-time event only taking care of past, pre-conversion sins, but is retained throughout our lives as we continually receive pardon or acquittal from God for our sins (based upon Christ’s merits) as the only basis for our acceptance by God, and reveal the genuineness of our justifying faith by the (real but always incomplete) sanctified fruit of obedience.154 There will never be a time this side of glorification when we will not be in “constant dependence upon the atoning blood of Christ”155 and in constant need of the merits of Christ’s righteousness to cover for our sinfulness:

The religious services, the prayers, the praise, the penitent confession of sin ascend from true believers as incense to the heavenly sanctuary, but passing through the corrupt channels of humanity, they are so defiled that unless purified by blood, they can never be of value with God. They ascend not in spotless purity, and unless the Intercessor, who is at God’s right hand, presents and purifies all by His righteousness, it is not acceptable to God. All incense from earthly tabernacles must be moist with the cleansing drops of the blood of Christ. He holds before the Father the censer of His own merits, in which there is no taint of earthly corruption. He gathers into this censer the prayers, the praise, and the confessions of His people, and with these He puts His own spotless righteousness. Then, perfumed with the merits of Christ’s propitiation, the incense comes up before God wholly and entirely acceptable.156

154 “When He sees men lifting the burdens, trying to carry them in lowliness of mind, with distrust of self and with reliance upon Him, He adds to their work His perfection and sufficiency, and it is accepted of the Father. We are accepted in the Beloved. The sinner's defects are covered by the perfection and fullness of the Lord our Righteousness. Those who with sincere will, with contrite heart, are putting forth humble efforts to live up to the requirements of God, are looked upon by the Father with pitying, tender love; He regards such as obedient children, and the righteousness of Christ is imputed unto them” (HP 23).

155 PP 352.

156 White, 1SM 344.
Without mentioning neither the word “justification” nor “faith,” Ellen White beautifully summarizes the essence of justification by faith in the following (my favorite!) quotation from her entire corpus:

It was possible for Adam, before the fall, to form a righteous character by obedience to God's law. But he failed to do this, and because of his sin our natures are fallen and we cannot make ourselves righteous. Since we are sinful, unholy, we cannot perfectly obey the holy law. We have no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims of the law of God. But Christ has made a way of escape for us. He lived on earth amid trials and temptations such as we have to meet. He lived a sinless life. He died for us, and now He offers to take our sins and give us His righteousness. If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.157

Addendum: Personal Experience

Growing up as a fourth generation Seventh-day Adventist in a time of our denominational history when the doctrine of justification by faith was often not clearly understood, it was not easy for me to grasp or accept this beautiful teaching of the Gospel. I was taught by well-meaning Bible teachers that justification was not by faith alone in Christ’s imputed righteousness, but somehow also included my works as part of the basis of my acceptance by God. I viewed justification as forgiving my past sins, but after conversion I felt I needed to depend upon my sanctification as the basis of my continued acceptance by God. Since my works of obedience seemed to always fall short of the divine standard, I had no assurance of salvation.

I believed that Christ, the Lamb of God, my Substitute, had died for my sins. But somehow I could not grasp that as I received Christ, I was covered with the robe of His

157 SC 62.
righteousness. It was too good to believe that as I gave myself to Him and accepted Him as my savior, God said to the great Accuser, “The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan!” (Zech 3:2). I did not dare to believe with assurance that I was acquitted, pardoned, cleansed. I failed to understand that I did not need to be “anxious about what Christ and God think of us, but about what God thinks of Christ, our Substitute.”158

I dared not believe it even as a theology major in college, as a seminary student, and as a young pastor. Inspired statements such as the following kept ringing in my ears: “Those who accept the Saviour, however sincere their conversion, should never be taught to say or to feel that they are saved.”159 I didn't understand that Ellen White was refuting the erroneous belief of “once saved, always saved.” I thought she meant that one could never have present assurance of salvation. How tragic that I did not continue to read in the very same paragraph God's assurance that we can “give ourselves to Christ and know that He accepts us”! As a young pastor, for several years I preached sermons about Christ yet devoid of assurance of salvation through an experiential knowledge of justification by faith. But finally through a chain of marvelous providential leadings, the beauty and simplicity of the gospel truth of justification began to dawn before my eyes.

The sublime promises jumped out at me from Scripture: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life” (John 6:47 RSV). “I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13 RSV; cf. vss. 11-12).

158 2 SM 32-33.
159 COL 155; cf. 1 SM 314.
The marvelous news that I am “accepted in the beloved” (Eph 1:6), that Christ is my righteousness, brought to my soul a joy and peace like that described by the ones who heard the message of justification by faith in the wake of the 1888 General Conference session. Ellen White captured my own feelings as she depicted the experience of many at the Ottawa, Kansas, camp meeting in 1889: “Light flashed from the oracles of God in relation to the law and the gospel, in relation to the fact that Christ is our righteousness, which seemed to souls who were hungry for the truth, as light too precious to be received.”¹⁶⁰ I felt like the young pastor at that Kansas camp meeting who “saw that it was his privilege to be justified by faith; he had peace with God, and with tears confessed what relief and blessing had come to his soul.”¹⁶¹

Since that experiential introduction to gospel assurance while I was a young pastor, the beauty of justification by faith has grown ever more precious. I must confess that sometimes it still seems almost too good to be true! I catch myself unconsciously falling back into old habit patterns of trying to be good enough to deserve salvation, and have to discover anew the joyous truth of “laying the glory of man in the dust”¹⁶² and trusting wholly in Christ's righteousness imputed to me as the basis of my acceptance with God. How precious, then, has the doctrine of justification by faith become to me!

Justification by faith is even more precious as I consider that we are living during the antitypical Day of Atonement, facing the close of probation and last day events. In ancient Israel throughout the Day of Atonement, the “daily” (tamid) sacrifice continued to burn on the bronze

¹⁶⁰ 1 SM 356.
¹⁶¹ Ibid.
¹⁶² TM 456.
altar (Num 28:2-7; 29:7-11), and the incense continued to waft over the inner veil and cover the holy ark (Exod 30:7-10). Throughout the antitypical Day of Atonement, even after the close of probation and the time of trouble, on to the time of glorification, we can have assurance of being accepted by God solely on the basis of the atoning blood and intercessory merits of Christ’s righteousness! Justification by faith is, and will remain till the end, the most precious truth that answers the age-old question of questions, “How can a mortal be just with God?”