

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Video Lecture Series

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

STUDY GUIDE

Module 5:
**SOTERIOLOGY—
THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION**

Lecture 6:
**THE DOCTRINE OF
JUSTIFICATION**



The John Knox Institute
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Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Authorized King James Version.

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Module 5

Soteriology—the Doctrine of Salvation

1. Introduction to Soteriology
2. The Doctrine of Union with Christ
3. The Doctrines of Effectual Calling & Regeneration
4. The Doctrine of Saving Faith
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- 6. The Doctrine of Justification**
7. The Doctrine of Adoption
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Module 5:

SOTERIOLOGY—THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Lecture 6:

The Doctrine of Justification

Introduction

Zechariah 3, verses 1 to 5 provides a very vivid picture of the doctrine of Justification—the Lord coming to a sinner, and plucking him as a brand from the fire. That’s God’s initiative and sovereign grace, in drawing a sinner to himself. Then the Lord takes away this natural pollution and defilement—the stains of sin that cover the believer, and that make him filthy in the Lord’s sight. He removes those iniquities, and instead He himself clothes his people with beautiful garments, so that they’re able to stand acceptably in His sight. Well, how important is Justification to the doctrine of Salvation? Martin Luther, the great German Reformer, said that Justification by faith alone is the article upon which the church stands or falls. It is the battleground of the gospel. It was in Luther’s day, and it continues to be in our own day.

Theme: *The doctrine of Justification.*

I. Scriptural Basis

“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference.” (Romans 3:21–22)

1. The dilemma: holy God, sinful man—how can these two be brought together?
2. The righteousness of God without the law, secured by Jesus Christ.
3. Sinners can receive and benefit from Christ’s righteousness
 - a. Faith appropriates Christ and his righteousness.
 - b. Faith, not by works or human merit, by grace alone.

Questions:

1. What is the spiritual dilemma that the Apostle Paul sets before us in the first three chapters of his letter to the Romans?

2. What is the good news which Paul turns to in Romans 3, verses 20 and 21?

3. How is it that sinners can receive and benefit from the righteousness of Christ? What is required?

II. Doctrinal Overview

As summarized in *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question #33:

“Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.”

1. Justification defined.

a. *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question #33

b. Justification is a single act—not ongoing.

c. It is a one-time, forensic act of God.

d. It declares a person righteous before God’s tribunal of justice.

1) It does not change the person’s inherent character.

e. It is permanent—it cannot be lost.

2. A review of the three imputations.

a. Adam’s sin is imputed to all his posterity.

b. The sin of elect believers is imputed to Christ.

c. Christ’s righteousness is imputed to elect believers.

3. The ground of Justification versus the instrument of Justification.
 - a. What is NOT the ground of justification:
 - 1) *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 11, paragraph 1.
 - 2) Not righteousness put in us.
 - 3) Not our attempts to obey the law.
 - 4) Not our faith in Christ
 - b. What IS the ground of Justification:
 - 1) *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 11, paragraph 3.
 - 2) It is an alien righteousness, comes from outside us.
 - 3) It is Christ's perfect righteousness and perfect obedience to the law.
 - c. The instrument of Justification is faith alone.
 - 1) *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 11, paragraph 2.
 - 2) Faith is not the consequence of Justification. Faith comes first.
 - 3) Through faith, the elect receive the merits of Christ's righteousness.
4. The relationship of Justification to good works.
 - a. Justification is by faith alone, not a mixture of faith plus other things.
 - b. The fruit of sanctification will flow out of Justification.
5. Moral impetus of Justification.
 - a. Justification does not result in licentiousness.
 - b. Overwhelming gratitude is a powerful motivation for good works.

Questions

1. What is the definition of Justification? What are the features of Justification that we can learn from *The Shorter Catechism*?

2. Why do we say that Justification does not make a man righteous? Then how does Justification affect the man?

3. In review, what are the “three imputations” that we learned previously?

4. What is NOT the ground of Justification? Why is this so important?

5. Then what exactly IS the ground of Justification? How does *The Westminster Confession of Faith* teach us about this?

6. What is the instrument of Justification? What is the nature of this instrument?

7. What is the biblical relationship between Justification and good works?

8. What is the moral impetus of Justification? What does the Roman Catholic church miss by their objection to Justification by faith alone?

III. Polemical Exposition

1. *Roman Catholic error: Justification is an infused grace.*
 - a. This lies behind their whole system of sacerdotalism with seven sacraments and the Mass.
2. *Roman Catholic error: Baptism is the instrument of Justification.*
 - a. They claim that ongoing sins are dealt with by ongoing penance in the soul.
 - b. This introduces works righteousness: baptism, penance, Mass, unction, etc.
 - c. This undermines the gospel.
3. *Resolving an apparent contradiction:*
 - a. Galatians 2:16—Man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Christ.
 - 1) Paul is emphasizing the declarative aspect of Justification.
 - 2) Paul is battling against dead works.
 - b. James 2:24—Man is justified by works and not by faith only.
 - 1) James is speaking of the demonstrative aspect of Justification.
 - 2) James is battling against dead faith.

Questions:

1. Does the Bible teach that Justification is an “infused grace”? Why should we resist this error?

2. How does the Roman Catholic church do away with Justification by faith alone?

3. What is the apparent contradiction between Galatians 2:16 and James 2:24? What aspect of Justification is Paul addressing? and what aspect of Justification is James addressing?

IV. Practical Exposition

1. There is ongoing forgiveness of justified elect sinners.
 - a. Christians continue to sin even after they are justified by faith.
2. Judicial forgiveness and paternal forgiveness.
3. Justification places Christ at the center of the gospel.
4. Dependence on Christ is ongoing in the Christian life.
5. A warning against a fruitless profession of faith.

Questions:

1. What is judicial forgiveness? What is paternal forgiveness?

2. What implications are there for justified sinners regarding the fact that we have ongoing forgiveness?

3. Why do we say that dependence on Christ is ongoing in the Christian life? How does the doctrine of Justification by faith alone encourage our dependence on Christ?

4. Why should we pay attention to James's warning against a fruitless profession of faith? Why should we expect to see spiritual fruit in the life of a professing Christian?

V. Self-Reflection

1. Read and reflect upon Zechariah 3, verses 1 to 5 again. How does the true doctrine of Justification help you in knowing God and knowing yourself?

2. As Rev. McCurley stated in the lecture, we often go to prayer and we conduct ourselves on the basis of how we feel, according to our frame of heart or mind. We think, Well, I've sinned in all these ways, so I can't draw near to God; or we think we need to clean up our life before we can come before the Lord; or we might think, "I don't feel lively;" or, "I feel cold and dead." But that means we are consulting our own internal frame. We must put Christ at the center, so that we are coming to prayer in dependence on Christ, not on ourself. How does this helpful truth guide you as you approach your personal prayer life?