

The Augsburg Confession 5

Lesson Five: Article IV Justification

Introduction

As an introduction to this article on justification, consider the following questions:

- How does a sinner have his sins forgiven?
- How does a sinner become a “good person” (righteous) in the eyes of God?

Article IV: Justification

¹ It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith, ² when

we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. ³ For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5.

Terms to know

- **Grace** – The unmerited love of God.
- **Infused grace** – Power from God to overcome temptation, bear up under tribulation, and live a Christian life.
- **Forensic** – Pertaining to a courtroom or to public discussion and debate. Syn: *judicial*.
- **Opinio legis** – “The opinion of the law.” The natural human inclination toward self-justification by the law.

Outline of Article IV: Justification

- I. Justification is the forgiveness of sins.
 - A. “Forgiveness of sins” is a *negative expression* (taking something away). **Psalm 32:1**.
 - B. Justification (the judicial or *forensic* act of declaring the sinner righteous) is the *positive expression* (giving something back). **Romans 8:33**; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Romans 3:24f. See also Deuteronomy 25:1; Proverbs 17:15; 1 Kings 8:32; Isaiah 5:23; Matthew 12:37; Luke 10:29.
 - C. Both designate complete justification. Against Rome: that the forgiveness of sins is only a part, the other being the practice of a real righteousness in life as a contributing factor toward justification. Romans 4:6-7; Psalm 32:1.
- II. Justification is not achieved by man himself.
 - A. People cannot be justified by their own strength. For the need of justification see **1 John 1:8-10**; Romans 3:9f, 23; Galatians 3:21f; **Luke 10:29**.
 - B. Our own good works in any form are excluded.
 2. Human strength – Roman/Semi-Pelagianism: Grace arouses the natural powers of man to activity that he may fulfill righteousness.

3. Human merit – Roman doctrine: Your best efforts, even if they fall short, will be charitably accepted and rewarded by God. Mormon doctrine of grace: “We are saved by grace after all we can do.”
4. Human works – Roman doctrine: For justification, “grace” is necessary. (Grace is a gift that God *infuses* into people so that they may build up their own treasury of righteousness.)

For reflection

Why is the tendency toward self-justification such an integral part of our human nature?

III. Justification is *by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith*.

- A. By grace – a gift of God. It is free in that it cost nothing to us. (It is not *cheap*.) Romans 3:24; 5:15; **Romans 4:16; 1 Peter 2:24**.
- B. For Christ’s sake. He by his death made satisfaction for our sins. *Vicarious atonement*. The scope of this justification is universal: **1 John 2:2; 2 Corinthians 5:19**; Romans 5:18f.
- C. Through faith.
 5. Not a mere head-knowledge, but repentance and trust. Cf. James 2:19; **Romans 10:14**; Romans 4:20-22; Ephesians 3:12.
 6. *Through faith, not because of faith or in view of faith*. The function of faith is justification. Faith is the receiving hand or the conduit through which justification is received. Romans 4:16; John 1:12; **Ephesians 2:8,9**.
 7. Saved by faith alone, *although faith is never alone*. **James 2:26**.

IV. Justification is *imputed*, a declaration of God.

- A. This faith – namely, in the merit of Christ, which we receive through faith.
- B. Imputes. Not *making* righteous physically or medicinally. Rather, a change in status before God’s throne. **Romans 4:3,5,6**.

Respond to the assertion: “If we are saved by grace alone through faith, then a person can do whatever he wants and still be saved.”

How does the gift of free salvation in Jesus change your outlook on living for God?

Confutation

The Catholic Confutation of the Augsburg Confession cites the following passages as proof that grace is imputed to believers so that they may build up their treasury of righteousness from God. Evaluate.

John 3:27 – No one is able to receive anything except what has been given from heaven.

James 1:17 – Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.

2 Corinthians 3:5 – Our competence comes from God.

John 6:44 – No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

1 Corinthians 4:7 – What do you have that you did not receive?

2 Timothy 4:7-8 – I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day.

2 Corinthians 5:10 – For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or evil.

Genesis 15:1 – Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your very great reward.

Isaiah 40:10 – See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

Isaiah 58:7-8 – Share your bread with the hungry... and your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.

Genesis 4:7 – If you do well, will you not be accepted?

Matthew 20:8 – Call the laborers and give them their pay.

1 Corinthians 3:8 – Each will receive wages according to the labor of each.

Revelation 3:4 – They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.

Colossians 1:12 – Give thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.