

# An Overview of the Various Understandings

Perhaps it would be beneficial—for the sake of easy reference—to have an overview of the understandings of justification and the assurance and security of salvation we have covered in more detail in the preceding articles. We limit this overview to prominent traditions that have distinctive and generally agreed upon views on these matters.

## On the Definition of Justification by Faith

For the Roman Catholic tradition, justification by faith is *an instantaneous infusion of righteous virtue* that makes the justified one no longer a sinner.

For the Methodist tradition, justification by faith is *pardon from sinful deeds*.

For the Lutheran tradition, justification by faith is *an external, forensic declaration* that the sinner is righteous despite the indwelling sin that remains.

For the Reformed tradition and its heirs, justification by faith is *a judicial act by which God transfers the record of Christ's perfect fulfillment of the law to the believer* and thereby declares him or her righteous.

For the Eastern Orthodox tradition, there is no justification by faith understood to be an instantaneous event at the initiation of the Christian life; justification is understood to be *a gradual and lifelong process* toward final approval at the judgment seat of Christ.

In our view—inherited from the Plymouth Brethren—justification is *God's approval of the believers based on their union with Christ as righteousness by faith*. Nothing can justify apart from union with Christ as righteousness, and union with Christ as righteousness suffices for justification without anything in addition (Campbell et al. 1:58-59).

## On the Assurance and Security of Salvation

*Neither assurance nor security*: The Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions deny the security of salvation and generally deny the assurance of salvation to all but a small number of believers under very particular circumstances. For these traditions, only some of the believers can know that they are saved, and all the believers are liable to fall from salvation in the future.

*Assurance without security*: The Lutheran and Methodist traditions firmly hold to the assurance of salvation but deny its security. While both traditions teach that the believers can know that they are presently saved, they also teach that this present salvation can be lost due to sin.

*Security with weak assurance*: The Reformed tradition and its heirs affirm both the assurance and the security of salvation, but their teaching concerning the perseverance of the saints has greatly undermined the assurance of salvation. All who are saved are saved eternally, but because true saving faith always produces certain kinds of fruit in the life of the believers, faith is assumed to be false if such fruit is absent. Since the believers cannot know whether they will persevere to the end, they cannot know whether their present faith is saving or false.

*Full assurance and security with boasting*: In our view—inheriting the recoveries of the Lutheran and Reformed traditions—the believers should be helped to know with confidence and boldness that they are saved (i.e., they should have the assurance of salvation), and they should be helped to know that their salvation cannot be lost (i.e., they should have the security of salvation) (Campbell et al. 1:59-60).

## On the Frequency of Justification by Faith

For the Eastern Orthodox tradition in general, there is no justification as a single, instantaneous, and complete event; rather, justification is *a lifelong process* of being made increasingly righteous in God's salvation.

For the Roman Catholic tradition, the believers are *justified initially in baptism*, often as infants, but easily lose the grace of justification through various sins and must have it *restored through the sacrament of penance* offered through the church.

For the Lutheran tradition, justification is *a constant action of God that is initiated in baptism, maintained throughout life* while faith is continually exercised and tried, and in need of restoration whenever faith is lost.

In our view—inherited from the Reformed tradition and its heirs—justification is *a single, instantaneous, and non-repeatable event* (Campbell et al. 1:60).