

CHAPTER 10.

JUSTIFICATION AND ADOPTION

“Justification is the article of faith by which the church stands or falls.” This famous statement has been attributed to the German reformer, Martin Luther (1483–1546). Simply put, the matter is this: there is nothing peripheral about the doctrine of justification. Rather it stands right at the heart of the Christian faith because it answers this question: how are corrupt sinners reconciled to a holy and just God?

There is a decidedly personal side to all of this as well. In fact, we can say that justification is also the article by which the peace of our own conscience stands or falls. Have you ever wondered how things really stand between God and you? Have you ever worried that he may still be angry with you and punish you for your transgressions on the final Judgment Day? No conscience is quiet until those basic questions receive some solid responses. The doctrine of justification, properly explained, provides the answers we are all eager to hear.

Adoption is another doctrine that addresses a key, personal question. This time the question is: who really are you? Many people in this world seek to establish their self-worth by obtaining a good, decent-paying job. In other words, people link their identity to their income level. Others try to shape their identity by having many friends, or famous friends, or many famous friends. Their idea is that if they associate with popular people, then they, too, will become popular. Still others want to be known as people who are unique. These individuals refuse to follow the

crowd. By the clothes they choose and the things they do, they indicate that they want to be the exception rather than the rule. Do you find yourself falling into any of these categories? By contrast, the doctrine of adoption presents an infinitely more profound and precious truth: by the grace of God I am a child of God and an heir to life everlasting (LD 13 & 23). You may be rich or poor, you may have many friends or none, you may have special talents or common skills, but whatever the case may be, when you believe in Christ you may confess, “I am a child of God.” *That*, above all else, defines who you really are.

These two doctrines, justification and adoption, are also closely connected to calling, regeneration, repentance, and faith, which we dealt with in the previous chapters. The call of the gospel is something that God sends *to us*. Regeneration, repentance, and faith are all gifts that God, through his Spirit, works *within us*. Justification and adoption are both declarations that God makes *concerning us*. The more we understand the full implications of these declarations, the more filled with wonder and joy we will become.

JUSTIFICATION: “NO CONDEMNATION FOR THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS” (ROM 8:1)

God is Just

Before delving into the doctrine of justification as such, it is advantageous to review briefly one of God’s attributes, or perfections: his justice.¹ There are two aspects of God’s justice. In the first place, he always and flawlessly knows the difference between righteousness and wickedness. Even the devil acknowledged God’s keen ability to discern between good and evil (Gen 3:5). Secondly, the LORD also upholds justice. He does what is right. He punishes the guilty and vindicates the upright (Gen 18:25). He shuns all bribes (Deut 10:17). Both within and outside the courtroom, he detests any attempt to twist the proper course of justice (Prov 17:15).

1. For more details see *Growing in the Gospel*, Volume 1, Chapter 5.

The LORD'S devotion to justice is something that is near and dear to him. The Psalms repeatedly declare that the LORD loves justice (Pss 11:7; 33:5; 99:4). In other words, for our God, justice is not merely an occasional interest but an eternal passion. In fact, his very own reputation is intimately tied up with justice. He is known throughout the nations for his justice (Ps 9:8, 16). Moreover, his justice is both vast and deep (Ps 36:6). Indeed, it is the very foundation upon which his throne is founded (Pss 89:14; 97:2). That is to say, it is impossible to separate God's sovereignty and his justice. Everywhere he rules, he always rules with perfect justice and equity.

The relationship between God and his justice is so close that it is even included within his name. When the LORD appeared to Moses, he proclaimed his name, saying, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious . . . forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty" (Exod 34:6–7). It is unfathomable that the LORD would not uphold the truth and honour of his own most holy name. Therefore, it is equally impossible that the LORD would say or do anything that would compromise justice. Particularly when it comes to the necessity of punishing the guilty, the LORD will not, indeed, he cannot just turn a blind eye to the iniquity that has been committed.

Yet precisely here we encounter the crux of the matter. All human beings are guilty in God's sight. The inspired psalmist David is rather straightforward about this, when he declares, "no one living is righteous before you," O LORD (Ps 143:2; see also Pss 14:1; 53:3; Eccl 7:20). Therefore, since all are guilty, it is to be expected that the God of all justice will punish them for their sin. Yet, as we learned in chapter 5 of this volume our God has punished Christ in our place (i.e., vicarious atonement), thereby at one and the same time upholding his justice and demonstrating his mercy. When the blessing of Christ's atoning work is applied to sinners, and those who are unrighteous by nature are granted the Mediator's perfect righteousness instead, we call this justification.

Did God Justify People by Works in the OT?

Before delving too deeply into this doctrine, though, we may wonder whether the Old Testament is more about justification by works while the New Testament is dominated by grace. After all, what does Moses say in Deuteronomy 6:25? “And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us.” That may sound like justification by works, but notice the little word *if* in this verse. To be sure, *if* someone *perfectly* obeys *all* of God’s law, this would constitute his righteousness before the LORD our God. However, the point is more than sufficiently established—right from within the OT itself—that there is no one who can claim to live up to that perfect standard of holy justice. Please note that in the last section all three scriptural passages about the universal unrighteousness of human beings were taken from the OT.

Moreover, it is remarkable that when the apostle Paul is busy rejecting justification by works and affirming justification by faith, he consistently turns to the OT to make his point (Rom 1:17; 3:9–18; 4:3; 4:7–8). Considering that God’s justice is tied to his name, and knowing that the LORD’S name affirms his consistency (Exod 3:14), it is not surprising that the doctrine of justification remains the same from the old to the new covenant. Would the eternal I AM WHO I AM have one method of saving sinners in the OT and a different approach in the NT? Never! Not only does the LORD judge sinners with equity (Pss 96:10; 98:9), but he also saves them with equity. The same doctrine of justification, initially revealed in the OT, reaches its fulfillment in Christ in the NT.

Acquitted and Accepted

It is now time to define in more detail what justification is. In its most basic meaning, this word speaks about a judge who gives someone a favourable verdict in a court case. In other words, the judge acquits the accused of the charges brought against him.

However, to appreciate the full depth of this doctrine we need to understand the context of the court case more thoroughly. A good place to

start is Lord's Day 5. The opening question reads: "Since, according to God's righteous judgment we deserve temporal and eternal punishment, how can we escape this punishment and be again received into favour?" The first part of the question clearly affirms God's justice and the severe punishment that we deserve. Yet the question continues by asking for a way in which two, closely related things can be accomplished. In the first place, we need an escape from temporal and eternal punishment, and secondly we long to be received back into God's favour. Both aspects of this question reach all the way back to the Garden of Eden itself. There, in Genesis 2:17, God gave a command ("of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat"), as well as a punishment for disobedience ("for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die"). However, Adam and Eve received more than a command in Paradise; they also received, and enjoyed, fellowship with God. The Almighty God was so close to Adam and Eve that he could walk and talk with them in the garden (Gen 3:8). To say it in another way, there was law in the garden, but there was also love.

Sin ruined all of this. In the first place, sin left Adam liable to be punished justly by God with death, and he did die (Gen 5:5). Yet in the second place, sin also disrupted the holy communion that God and his first children once enjoyed. No longer did they walk and talk together in the garden. On the contrary, Adam and Eve were banished from the garden (Gen 3:23), with angels and a flaming sword blocking any attempt to return to the garden. God's rule was transgressed, but Adam and Eve's relationship with God was also broken.

It is with this background in mind that the first question of Lord's Day 5 was drafted. Simply put, justification has two parts, or sides, to it. On the one hand, when God justifies someone, he forgives that person's sins, entirely and eternally. He will no longer suffer the punishment of eternal death, even though he deserves it. However, on the other hand, when God justifies someone, he also restores a wholesome and loving relationship with him.

You could compare it, for example, to the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. The son returns from his immoral escapades in order to seek his father's forgiveness. The son himself does not think that he is worthy to be his father's son anymore (v. 21). However, the father determines otherwise. Not only does he forgive his son, but he also clothes him in a fine robe and hosts a feast in celebration of his return. The father is not content merely to give forgiveness. He also rebuilds the relationship of trust and love that he once had with his son. In part, this explains why we will consider adoption right after justification in this chapter. Justification is intimately tied up with the matter of restoring peace and rebuilding relationships.

So how does this happen? As with every aspect of salvation, God is the initiator. The sinner, covered from head to toe in his guilt (Isa 1:5–6), appears in God's courtroom, as it were. The most reasonable expectation is that the sinner will be declared guilty and condemned to suffer God's righteous punishment, both in this life and the next. However, based on the sinless life of Christ and the perfect satisfaction of his death on the cross, our gracious-yet-just Judge chooses to acquit the sinner instead! Rather than being sent to punishment, the sinner is set free, free to live out of eternal gratitude to his Saviour.

In addition, from his side, the Judge also declares that since the obstacle of sin has been removed, peace may be restored. As he justifies the sinner, God also officially welcomes him back into the arms of his everlasting love. The prodigal son is both forgiven and given the feast of restored fellowship. The apostle Paul says it in this way, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1), but at the same time, "since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1).

At the same time, this does not mean that salvation is therefore reduced to nothing more than the outcome of a heavenly court case. In this first place, justification is but one part of the entire miracle of salvation, even if it is a critical part. Yet as we are discovering in these chapters, salvation includes a vast array of blessings, the entire order of salvation,

not just justification. In addition, the legal context of justification is a tremendously positive, not a negative, aspect. Let us turn back to that basic question: where do you stand with God? Are your sins forgiven or not? Thinking for a moment about this question, which is better: to have someone say, “I hope that God has forgiven my sins” or to have someone confess, “the Judge of all the earth has declared, legally and officially, that he has pardoned me from all my sins and I have been freed from eternal punishment”? Surely, the latter, legally confirmed, announcement is much more effective at quieting the conscience.

Also, God justifies within the context of the covenant. At Mount Sinai, the LORD both gave his law (Exod 20:1–17) and confirmed his covenant with his people (Exod 24:8). In fact, God’s law is called the “words of the covenant” (Exod 34:28). Since the covenant is a legally binding relationship, and since sin transgresses the words of this covenant, any forgiveness of sin must also carry legal weight. In fact, it could not be otherwise. After all, the same God who justifies is the one who initially established the covenant. So, even as he announces acquittal for the sinner, he remembers his covenant at the same time (1 Chron 16:15).

Thus, in sum, justification is God’s gracious, official, and legal declaration that a sinner has been acquitted in his sight and once again received into favour and loving fellowship with him. The Catechism puts it concisely and accurately when it says, “In Christ I am righteous before God and heir to life everlasting” (LD 23, Q&A 59).

Because of Christ’s Merits

By now it has already been mentioned a few times that we are justified in Christ. Theologians sometimes refer to this as the basis, or foundation, of our justification. That Christ is the cornerstone underneath our justification is clear from a number of passages in Scripture. The apostle Paul certainly left no doubt about the matter when he proclaimed in Pisidian Antioch, “Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed

by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38–39). This is confirmed in Romans 8:1 where the same apostle writes, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Also pertinent is 1 Corinthians 6:11 where we read, “You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Indeed, Christ is our “righteousness” (1 Cor 1:30). Thus, our righteousness is not found in ourselves, but outside of ourselves, in Christ.

With Christ as the basis of our justification, God’s own justice is upheld as well. As mentioned previously, God cannot compromise his justice in any way. For this reason, Christ is the way. He willingly took upon himself all the righteous wrath of God for the sins committed by his people. Sometimes this is also called Christ’s *passive obedience*. At the same time, he perfectly obeyed the entire law of God during the whole time he was here upon this earth. This is also called Christ’s *active obedience*. These two theological terms do have their limitations. For example, Christ’s death is the central part of his passive obedience, yet he was not merely a passive victim on the cross. On the contrary, he actively committed his spirit into the Father’s hands (Luke 23:46). However, even if these terms have some limitations, they do express a valuable truth. The Belgic Confession puts it this way: “he [God] imputes to us all his [Christ’s] merits and as many holy works as he has done for us and in our place” (Art. 22). The Catechism concurs when it says, “He [God] grants these [Christ’s merits] to me as if I had never had nor committed any sin, and as if I myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me, if only I accept this gift with a believing heart” (LD 23, Q&A 60).

Since the work of Christ is so complete, the basis of our justification is so secure. As mentioned from the outset, our consciences cannot rest until we know, for certain, that things are entirely right between God and us. As soon as our justification begins to rest partially on Christ and partially on the Christian, all confidence is lost and the conscience is still afflicted. Yet since Christ has both suffered for our sins and obeyed the law in our stead, our soul can find rest—complete, eternal, and legally legitimate rest—in Christ alone (Ps 62:1; Matt 11:29).

Only by True Faith

Now that we have established Christ as the basis of our justification, we can move ahead to the instrument of our justification, which is faith. The truth can be expressed in two short questions and answers. Why are we justified? Because of Christ's merits. By what means are we justified? Only by true faith. Once again, Scripture makes this abundantly clear. For the sake of brevity, two passages will be mentioned. The first is from the Old Testament: "The righteous shall live by his faith" (Hab 2:4). The second is from the New Testament: "We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified" (Gal 2:16). Other texts could also be cited such as Romans 4:5, 5:1, and Galatians 3:11.

The Reformed Confessions are emphatic on this point. In Lord's Day 23 the Heidelberg Catechism uses the phrase "only by faith," or something very similar, no less than four times. Similarly, the Belgic Confession confirms that "faith is the only instrument by which we embrace Christ our righteousness" (Art. 22). Maintaining "only by faith" as the instrument of justification is directly related to keeping "Christ alone" as the basis for justification. Faith is trust in Christ. To be more specific, faith trusts that Christ provides "all we need for our salvation," and therefore, "it is a terrible blasphemy to assert that Christ is not sufficient, but something else is needed besides him; for the conclusion would then be that Christ is only half a Saviour" (BC 22). Simply put, the point is this: if our good works begin to wiggle their way into either the basis or instrument of our justification, then we have compromised the complete sufficiency of Christ's work for our salvation. Once again, if our works play a role, be it ever so small, in either the basis or instrument of our justification, then we are really saying that Christ needs our help in order to save us. And that, as the Belgic Confession forcefully yet aptly says, is blasphemy. The LORD is our helper (Ps 124:8); we are not his.

This does not mean that good works are unimportant. The Catechism emphasizes both justification in Christ through faith (LD 23 & 24), as well as sanctification in a life of good works by the power of the Spirit of Christ (LD 32). However, it puts a distance of some eight or nine Lord's Days between the two. Justification falls in the second part of the Catechism under deliverance. Sanctification falls in the third part of the Catechism under thanksgiving. Thus, justification and sanctification are distinct blessings from the Lord. They should not be blended together into one indiscernible pulp.

A Person is Justified by What He Does?

Since the apostle Paul emphasizes so strongly that we are justified by faith and not by works, it is rather surprising, if not a bit alarming, to read the apostle James write, "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone" (2:24). Even Martin Luther had trouble figuring out how Paul and James could be harmonized on this point.

However, since we are convinced that Scripture is the inspired Word of God, not merely the words of men, we must seek to understand this apparent contradiction. The Holy Spirit does not contradict himself and leave people confused, especially over such a central truth as the doctrine of justification. To begin with, in his letters to the Romans and Galatians, the apostle Paul is speaking out against false teachers who were insisting that all Christians, whether Jew or Gentile, should uphold the OT laws, especially those pertaining to circumcision, festive days, and food purity (Rom 2:25–29; 14:1–23). For them faith in Christ plus adherence to certain OT ceremonial requirements equals salvation. The apostle Paul rejects this pollution of the gospel, insisting that sinners are justified by faith in Christ, not by performing works of the law (Gal 2:15–16).

The apostle James, though, is dealing with a different situation. At least some of the believers to whom he writes were inclined to think that it was enough to profess faith with your words, even if you did not demonstrate faith in your deeds (Jas 2:14–18). Such a superficial faith is, in reality, dead (Jas 2:26), and faith that is dead does not embrace Christ.

Without Christ there is no salvation (Acts 4:12). When James insists on the necessity of a living faith for salvation, he is in complete agreement with Paul who also insisted that “in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love” (Gal 5:6).

Still, even if we account for the different audiences and different issues that these two apostles are addressing in their letters, we are still left with those unsettling words of James: “You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone” (2:24). If only he had said, “the faith by which we are justified must be a true and living faith,” there would be no issue. However, he did not say it that way, and we must deal honestly with the text of Scripture. So, why does James say that “a person is justified by works”? The most straightforward way to resolve this issue is to remind ourselves of the basic meaning of the word *justify*. When someone is justified, the judge rules in his favour and declares that he is acquitted of the charges laid against him. This immediately leads to the next question. In the context of James 2, what kind of charge is being brought against Abraham in this particular court case? The occasion mentioned in James 2:21 is the time when Abraham was commanded to go and sacrifice his son, Isaac. God gave this command to him in order to test him (Gen 22:1). In the courtroom of Genesis 22, then, the believer Abraham is brought before the tribunal, and the question laid before the Judge is this: “Is Abraham a fair-weather believer who only trusts in God when things are going well? Or is Abraham a genuine believer who trusts in the LORD, even when he has to go through the most heart-wrenching trial of his life?” In essence, it is the same question that Satan set before the LORD concerning Job: “Does Job fear God for no reason?” (Job 1:9).

To be absolutely clear, in James 2 the question before the court is *not* “How will Abraham the sinner escape the punishment he deserves for his iniquity?” If that had been the question, then James, too, would have said, “You see, a person is justified by faith and not by works.” However, this time the question before the court is different. Now the question is, “How can it be proven that Abraham’s faith is really genuine?” The correct answer is: “God, the Judge, clears Abraham of any charge of

having a merely fair-weather faith by looking at his works, especially his willingness to sacrifice his own son.” Or to state it briefly, “you see, a person (who has been charged with having a superficial faith) is justified by works and not by faith alone.” We can be quite sure that the apostle Paul would have wholeheartedly agreed with this.

Justification & Judgment Day

Properly speaking, Judgment Day belongs to a study of the last things, also called eschatology. So, we will come back to this topic in the next volume of this series. However, before we leave the doctrine of justification we must briefly yet emphatically affirm that when God justifies those who believe in Christ, then he acquits them from punishment both now and on Judgment Day. Consequently, there is no tentative or temporary justification, which still has to be eternally ratified on Judgment Day. A teaching like that demolishes the peace of a believer’s conscience. How can anyone find rest in Christ today (Matt 11:26), if he is still left in suspense as to whether he will be acquitted of his sins on Judgment Day? Such a teaching is not good news; it is anxiety-inducing news.

At the same time, and even more importantly, this whole notion of a present, tentative justification is not the truth taught in Scripture. To cite but one example, Romans 8:1 begins with the unequivocal statement: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” It is conceivable that someone might say, “Yes, *now* there is no condemnation, but in the future there might be.” However, such a statement runs contrary to the rest of the chapter. For once someone is grafted into Christ by faith, who can still bring any accusation against him? No sooner does the apostle mention someone who is “justified” (8:30) and he immediately adds, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (8:31) and “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn?” (8:33–34) Furthermore, the final verses of the chapter assure us that nothing, not even “the future,” will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore, the message is clear: when the God of justice acquits someone, his verdict

applies both now and forever, including the final Judgment Day. Since God is the God of justice and equity, we would not expect anything else either.

ADOPTION: “IN CHRIST JESUS YOU ARE ALL SONS OF GOD THROUGH FAITH” (GAL 3:26)

As we discovered in the previous section, justification really contains two aspects: God releases the sinner from punishment, but he also welcomes the justified sinner back into his favour. The doctrine of adoption is really an elaboration of this second aspect. As we are welcomed back into God’s favour, we are actually ushered back into his household *as his very own children*. Lord’s Day 23 points in this direction when it affirms, “In Christ I am righteous before God and heir to life everlasting.” The use of the word “heir” indicates that adoption and justification are closely related because inheritance is given to those who are children, even as the apostle says, “If children, then heirs” (Rom 8:17).

In order to appreciate some of the depth of Scripture’s teaching regarding our adoption, we need to step back briefly to the Garden of Eden. There our first parents were created in God’s image and likeness. Among other things, this indicated that God made human beings to be his children, not just his creatures. This is especially clear from Genesis 5:1–3 where creation in the image of God stands within the genealogical relationship of a father and his children.²

By their fall into sin, our first parents chose to be ungrateful rebels rather than respectful children of God. They forfeited all the privileges of belonging to the Creator’s household and opted instead to throw their life and lot in with Satan. Later on Jesus even said to some of the unbelieving Jewish leaders that they acted like their “father the devil” (John 8:44), even speaking his native language, which is deceit and lying.

Yet, in his mercy, God did not allow his chosen ones to continue running down the ruinous path of allegiance to Satan. He turned them around

2. For more details see *Growing in the Gospel*, Volume 1, Chapter 9.

(repentance) and brought them back, not only to the point of trusting him again (faith), but also to the point of being graciously re-admitted into his household—not merely as slaves or servants but truly as children and heirs. The apostle Paul even reassured Gentile believers that they were not second-class citizens in God’s kingdom. On the contrary, they were “fellow citizens with the saints,” and even “members of the household of God” (Eph 2:19).

As with justification, and every other blessing of salvation, this is all possible only because of Jesus Christ, God’s only-begotten Son. We become sons and daughters of God only through *the* Son of God. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul says it this way: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:4–5). The Holy Spirit also plays an integral role in all of this. “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Gal 4:6). In fact, the Spirit of Christ is even called the Spirit of adoption or the Spirit of sonship (Rom 8:15).

The sheer wonder of this truth should not be lost in a maze of metaphor. Scripture does not say that through Christ it is *as if* we were children of God. Sometimes, in human families, parents treat a certain child as if that child were their own. Perhaps they really like that child. Perhaps that child is somewhat neglected by his own parents. Whatever the case, this particular child may be thankful that those adults treat him with such kindness, but he also realizes that he is not really their son, and they are not really his parents. Such is *not* the case with God our heavenly Father. When he takes us in as his children, it is the real thing. “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God.” And not only called children of God, but the apostle John immediately adds, “And so we are” (1 John 3:1).

Moreover, adoption is a legally binding process by which a certain child becomes the full and legitimate son or daughter of the adoptive parents. After the proper, legal papers are signed and sealed, the adopted child is just as much a son or daughter as any naturally born children. As children

and heirs, they also share fully in the eternal inheritance of final glory, which is stored up for God's household in heaven (Rom 8:17; 1 Pet 1:3, 4).

Adoption is not only legally binding, but it also for life. Adoption is not temporary assistance, but rather a permanent arrangement. No wonder that John Calvin did not hesitate to say that our salvation consists in our adoption.³ What he meant to emphasize is that once God has adopted undeserving sinners, such as us, as his very own beloved children, what more could we ask for? What more could we need? With God Almighty as our faithful Father in heaven, all our needs, both for body and for soul, both in this life and the next, will be taken care of. With God Almighty as our loving Father in heaven, our souls can find rest in the Lord Jesus Christ. Not only do we know that in Christ all is well between God and us, but we also know that in Christ we are children of God, no matter what other people think or say about us.

Suggested Readings: Romans 3:21–31; 1 John 3:1–3

QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. What is the basis of justification? What is the instrument of justification? What would happen if someone would mix up, or combine, the basis and instrument? (Hint: LD 23, Q&A 61; BC 22 second paragraph)
2. First, read Genesis 15:6 and then Psalm 106:30, 31 along with Numbers 25:7, 8. One seems to indicate that Abraham was counted righteous before God by faith while the other that Phineas was counted righteous before God because of his courageous and upright work. How should we understand the difference between these passages?
3. What precisely is the difference between justification and sanctification? Why is this difference so important? How can we prevent them from becoming unhelpfully blended together in our hearts and minds?

3. *Calvin's Commentaries* on Romans 8:29 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959).

4. Lord's Day 23 speaks about God's children as heirs to life everlasting. Using a concordance, find places in the New Testament that speak about *heirs*, *inherit*, or *inheritance*. In this way you will be able to discover a broader picture of what our inheritance all includes. Share your findings with your study group and appreciate together the immeasurable riches of God's grace (Eph 2:7).

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. The Roman Catholic Council of Trent (1545–1563) made various proclamations about the doctrine of justification. One of these statements reads as follows: "If any one says, that the justification received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works; but that the aforementioned works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not a cause of the increase thereof; let him be anathema" (Session 6, Chapter 16, Canon 24). In sum, this Council teaches an increase of justification. Can justification be increased? Why or why not?
2. A sincere, fellow Christian confides in you that she is scared of Judgment Day. You assure her that she has nothing to be afraid of because all of her sins are forgiven in Jesus Christ. She counters, "Yes, I know that but Jesus said we'll have to give account for every little careless word (Matt 12:36), and there's tonnes of careless words that I've never asked to be forgiven because I don't even realize how careless my tongue can be sometimes. So, I'm still scared." Take some of the more detailed aspects of the doctrine of justification found in this chapter and discuss how you could use them to comfort this sister.
3. Romans 8:23 speaks about how "we wait eagerly for adoption as sons." Yet at the same time in 1 John 3:2, we learn that "we are God's children now." So, which is it: is our adoption a future hope or present reality? You may need to use some reliable commentaries to delve into these verses and their contexts.