

## Lesson 11 JUSTIFICATION, FAITH

### 11.1 The Ground of Justification

Because of His complete obedience, Christ merits and receives a full reward: the salvation and sanctification of all His children. His obedience is both active and passive: He fulfils the just requirements of the law, and also takes upon Himself the penalty and punishment of the law. In this two-fold way He makes complete intercession for us, giving us access to God. Thus we say we are justified solely by Christ's blood, Romans 3:25, 4:25.

Article 22 and Article 23 of the Belgic Confession stress that Christ's work is the only ground of our justification. We may never seek any ground in ourselves. Justification means to be put right with God, to be completely **innocent** and acceptable before His throne. We share this justification only in being fully ingrafted into Christ, and into His death and resurrection, Romans 6:1f; 1 Corinthians 1:30.

### 11.2 The Means of Justification

In order to appropriate all these benefits of Christ and make them our own, we must believe the gospel. Hence we say we are justified **by faith**. The LORD gives His blessings to His children in the way of faith and obedience. This rule of the covenant, which goes back to paradise, is always maintained in God's Word. When we confess our sins and turn to God, we may receive all the blessings and gifts of Christ freely, out of mere grace, Romans 3:28.

We must remember that the faith which justifies us is not our own doing; it is a gift of God, Ephesians 2:8. Faith is kindled in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, through the preaching of the gospel, Romans

10:14f, Lord's Day 25. We are not justified on the ground of faith, or because of faith. We are justified **through** (by means of, in the way of) faith. Faith is the instrument by which we appropriate Christ and all His benefits. This way or means of justification is established and maintained by God.

We distinguish two aspects to faith (Lord's Day 7):

- i. a sure knowledge - accepting the Word of God
- ii. a firm confidence - trusting in the LORD who gives and maintains His promises.

Faith is also a human responsibility. God always gives His gifts in the way of active and responsible human obedience. Although faith has no merit in itself we must believe to be saved, and there is no salvation without faith in Christ.

### 11.3 **The Nature of Justification**

Although we cannot distinguish between justification and sanctification in either the time or the way they are given to us, we do distinguish them according to their essential nature. Justification is fundamentally a legal matter, taking place outside of us, and apart from us. It is an act of God's free grace, a declaration of innocence passed wholly outside of us through which the perfect righteousness of Christ is freely imputed to us.

The easiest way for us to grasp justification conceptually is to think of a court case in heaven. Lord's Day 23 depicts this court case to us:

God versus **sinner****sinner in Christ**

- |  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| a. grievously sinned against God's law | a. satisfaction       |
| b. kept none of the commandments       | b. righteousness      |
| c. still inclined to all evil          | c. holiness in Christ |

All Christ's blessings are given freely; the only condition is faith, this faith itself is only an instrument, and ultimately it, too, is freely given.

Two elements may also be distinguished in our justification:

1. The remission of sins

This is the legal declaration of innocence that makes us acceptable to God, Psalm 32:1; Colossians 2:14,15.

2. The adoption as sons

This is the legal declaration of acceptance, through which we may be called children of God, Ephesians 1:5; 1 John 3:1; John 1:12; Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:17.

## Exercises Lesson 11

## I. Reference Passages

Memorize: Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 23.

Study and Review: Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 23, 24, 51.  
Belgic Confession, Article 22,23.  
Canons of Dort, Chapter II. 1, 7, 8 re II, 4;  
Chapter III/IV. 3-6; See the Rejection of  
Errors III/IV. 4,5.

## II. Review Questions

1. What is **justification**? What is the only ground for our justification?
2. What is our situation before God without Christ? Prove your answer from Scripture.
3. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in our justification? The role of the Father?
4. What is the difference between justification and **sanctification**? Where does justification really occur?
5. What is faith called in relation to justification in Article 22, Belgic Confession?
6. What does true faith involve? How is it worked in our hearts?

**III. Extra Questions**

1. What place did the Arminians give to faith in God's work of justification?
2. Does justification only happen once, or is it repeated in our life?
3. When did God actually justify us according to Romans 5? But how does this accord with the reality of daily sins and daily repentance?