

Justification: Twelve Theses

(still searching for another 83)

1. The doctrine of justification is a **key element of Christian soteriology**. It is especially prominent in Galatians and Romans, but it is more than a “battle doctrine,” being rooted in fundamental theological convictions.
2. The concept of justification is defined primarily by the NT (and especially Paul's) use of the verb "justify" (*dikaioō*), and also **related** occurrences of the adjective "just" (*dikaios*) and the noun "righteousness" (*dikaiosynē*).
3. The language describing the concept of justification reflects the **OT (LXX) use of the verb "justify"** to refer to a legal decision. Judges were to "declare righteous," or "vindicate," those who truly were innocent, or "righteous" (e.g., 2 Kings 8:31-32; cf. Exod. 23:7).
4. Justification is a concept rooted in the **OT and Jewish conviction** that God would himself "vindicate" his faithful people (e.g., Israel) in the last judgment (e.g., Isa. 51:4-8).
5. Justification is a forensic declaration that "vindicates" a person **before God**. It signals the transfer from old realm to new realm (Rom. 5:1, 9-10).
6. According to NT revelation, God justifies not national Israel but spiritual Israel, composed of **all who belong to Christ**, himself the embodiment of Israel. A distinctive focus of NT justification is therefore its availability to every person, whether Gentile or Jew (e.g., Rom. 3:23-24, 30; 10:4).
7. Justification is granted to people who are still, in themselves, sinful, **“ungodly”** (Rom. 4:5).
8. Justification takes place **"in Christ"** (e.g., Gal. 2:17), whose death atoned for our sins (e.g., Rom. 3:24; 5:9) and whose resurrection secures our vindication (Rom. 4:25).
9. God can remain "righteous" even while he justifies people who are in themselves ungodly (see point 3) because he views them in their **union with Christ**, through which union they are accredited the righteousness of Christ himself (Rom. 3:25-26; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 8:3-4).
10. Justification is actualized only by **faith in Christ** (in contrast to any "doing" on the part of human beings) (Gal. 2:16; Rom. 3:20, 22, 28).
11. Although justification, being a forensic verdict, does not include moral transformation, justification is **inseparably joined to sanctification**, for both are given to believers in their union with Christ (Rom. 6:1-11; 1 Cor. 1:30).
12. Justification partakes of the NT **"already"/"not yet" eschatological tension**: we are definitively justified at conversion (Rom. 5:9, 10) but this decision must be confirmed at the judgment (Gal. 5:5), at which time our works are taken into account (Jas. 2:14-26).