

The Controversy Over The Doctrine of Eternal Justification

Introduction

It is necessary for us to investigate what the Bible states about the timing of justification, in the light of the eternal decree, since a controversy has raged for four hundred years on this matter, and continues today. It is usually associated in history with the Antinomians¹ who first arose after the Reformation had started and who were not only accused of misrepresenting the Bible, but of committing great acts of sinfulness. Sadly, good men have been wrongfully associated with these Antinomians, men who were great preachers of the Gospel and stalwarts of godly theology like John Gill. While Antinomians based their understanding of there being no need for godly behaviour, or keeping any moral law, upon claiming they were justified in eternity and thus sinless, men who preached justification in eternity were not necessarily Antinomian, nor guilty of overemphasis.

Why look at this now?

However, in some circles today the eternal aspect of justification is over-emphasised. The reason for this is noble, it is to emphasise the sovereignty of God in grace and focus upon the plan of God in salvation, as opposed to the elevation of man in the synergism of Arminianism and Amyraldianism. But some writers have gone too far, suggesting, like the Antinomians, that all has been accomplished in eternity - before the cross had occurred. Faith becomes just the application to the conscience about what happened in eternity.

On this note what Arthur Pink has to say:

What is the relation of faith to justification? Antinomians and hyper-Calvinists answer, Merely that of comfort or assurance. Their theory is that the elect were actually justified by God before the foundation of the world, and all that faith does now is to make this manifest in their conscience. This error was advocated by such men as W. Gadsby, J. Irons, James Wells, J.C. Philpot. That it originated not with these men is clear from the fact that the Puritans refuted it in their day.

“By faith alone we obtain and receive the forgiveness of sins; for notwithstanding any antecedent act of God concerning us in and for Christ, we do not actually receive a complete soul-freeing discharge until we believe” (J. Owen).

“It is vain to say I am justified only in respect to the court of mine own conscience. The faith that Paul and the other Apostles were justified by, was their believing on Christ that they might be justified (Galatians 2:15, 16), and not a believing they were justified already; and therefore it was not an act of assurance” (T. Goodwin, vol. 8 [Justifying Faith PF]).

AW Pink, *The Doctrine of Justification*, Ages CD Rom, p60-61. Or, *The Doctrines of Election & Justification*, Baker, (1974) p.237

¹ Antinomian = ‘against law’. These are people who saw no need to keep God’s law. They claimed they couldn’t sin and needed no confession or forgiveness since all their evil deeds were obliterated in eternity when God justified them. The worst were frequently guilty of heinous and public sins. Some folk are falsely accused of this error because they do not hold that the Law of Moses is God’s absolute rule of faith; instead they believe that the law is formally abrogated as a standard of living. Instead the rule of life for the believer is Christ himself and his law applied by the Spirit - an internal and deeper law than the Law of Moses.

This undue emphasis continues today; for instance: an article by Don Fortner published in *New Focus*, Vol. 9.4, Dec/Jan 2005:

- *We were sanctified, set apart ... and made holy by the eternal decree of God.* (p8) But how can we be made holy without the cross?
- *We were justified in Christ then, in God's eternal decree. All who were called were, at the same time, by the same decree, justified freely by the grace of God.* (p8) But how can the grace of God be applied without the Holy Spirit applying the benefits of redemption?
- *We were declared just with God, absolved of all sin and guilt, forgiven of all iniquity, made righteous by divine imputation and accepted as perfectly righteous in the beloved, in Christ our Surety before God spoke the world into being.* (p8) God cannot lie; how can he state that we are perfectly righteous and then later state that we are dead in trespasses and sins, enemies of God? How can we be forgiven all iniquity, absolved of all sin and at the same time be said by Paul to be sinners: **There is none righteous, no, not one** (Rm 3:10). As Calvin says, 'Faith justifies ... as it introduces us into a participation of the righteousness of Christ.'
- *He justified us in His eternal decree ... our sins were cancelled before they were committed. Our debt was paid before it was incurred... We were justified in Christ before we were fallen in Adam... From everlasting ... He looked upon us as justified.* (p8) In Rm 5:1-2 Paul says that we have access to justification and grace by faith. If we had no access to it before, then we did not have the benefits of it. Justification follows faith.
- *From everlasting ... we were considered righteous ... the righteousness of Christ was imputed to us.* (p8) Paul says that Christ died for the ungodly, when we had no spiritual strength or capability (Rm 5:6). How can Christ see us as ungodly yet God view us as redeemed and righteous at the same time?
- *He called us His sons ... in His eternal decree, looking on us as his dear Son ... We were accepted in Christ before we were banished in Adam.* Yet scripture states unequivocally that, by nature, we were children of wrath before our conversion (Eph 2:3).
- *The whole package of salvation was given to us in Christ ... before the foundation of the world.* (p9) If this were true then we would already have new spiritual bodies, a crucial aspect of eternal salvation. We would also have no actual sin today.

The crucial question: a decree to justify or a decree that justifies?

The key question is: 'does the Bible view us as sinners or redeemed before regeneration?' The Biblical, confessional and orthodox view is that we are seen as sinners under wrath until converted by the gift of faith. Theologically we could pose the question as: does the eternal decree actually justify, or does God decree to justify in time by faith? Historical orthodoxy teaches the latter, Don Fortner believes the former.

Regarding the time when justification was completed, there have been various answers:

1. At the Day of Judgment.
2. At the time faith in Christ is exercised.
3. At Christ's resurrection.
4. At the time the Messiah was promised after the Fall.
5. In the eternal decree. [Which some call the covenant of redemption, though this is nowhere stated in scripture.]

Adherents of *actual* justification in eternity, like Fortner, hold to number 5 and emphasise that full justification is complete before faith. However, there are theologians who have made statements that appear, at first sight, to agree with Fortner's views; yet on further

reading, some affirm a threefold nature of justification (see later), but none repeat Fortner's extreme claims, such as that adoption and sanctification occurred in eternity past.² For this reason, they are unjustly accused of holding Antinomian views of eternal justification. For example:

John Gill:

*As God's will to elect, is the election of his people, so his will to justify them, is the justification of them; as it is an immanent act in God, it is an act of his grace towards them, is wholly without them, entirely resides in the divine mind, and lies in his estimating, accounting, and constituting them righteous, through the righteousness of his Son; and, as such, did not first commence in time, but from eternity. [‘Justification as an eternal and immanent act of God’, *Body of Divinity*, Book 2, chap. 5, sec. 2.]*

In his 1750 sermon, *The Doctrine of Justification by the Righteousness of Christ*, Gill speaks of a threefold nature of justification: the decree in eternity, the decree's effect in time in the believer by faith, as well as justification before all men at the Final Judgment. However, these aspects of justification in time are, for Gill, merely repetitions of eternal justification, which is where *actual* justification took place: *the date of justification ... [is at the time of the] covenant transactions between the Father and the Son, and the suretyship engagements of Christ from eternity. ... First, I shall endeavour to prove that that which is properly justification, is antecedent to any act of believing. Secondly, That the justification, by, or at, or upon believing, is not properly justification. [p.17-18]* Fortner is close to Gill, but uses more extravagant language and claims, which I suggest Gill would not approve of. [Fortner goes much further than Gill who can be seen to deny Fortner's claims about sanctification etc. in Appendix Three.]

Abraham Kuyper:

Justification is effected outside of us, irrespective of what we are, dependent only upon the decision of God, our judge and Sovereign. ... Hence the Sacred Scripture reveals justification as an eternal act of God, i.e., an act which is not limited by any moment in the human existence. ... justification does not occur when we become conscious of it, but that, on the contrary, our justification was decided from eternity in the holy judgment-seat of our God. There is undoubtedly a moment in our life when for the first time justification is published to our consciousness; but let us be careful to distinguish justification itself from its publication. ... There is a certain moment wherein that justification becomes to our consciousness a living fact; but in order to become a living fact, it must have existed before. It does not spring from our consciousness, but it is mirrored in it ... in God's judiciary it is more particularly the Father who justifies the ungodly, and in the preparing of salvation more particularly the Son who in His Incarnation and Resurrection brings about justification, so it is, in more limited sense, the Holy Spirit particularly who reveals this justification to the persons of the elect and causes them to appropriate it to themselves. It is by this act of the Holy Spirit that the elect obtain the blessed knowledge of their justification, which only then begins to be a living reality to them.

For this reason Scripture reveals these two positive, but apparently contradictory truths, with equally positive emphasis: (1) that, on the one hand, He has justified us in His own judgment-seat from eternity; and (2) that, on the other, only in conversion are we justified by faith.

² Fortner also mentions justification at the cross and upon faith, but his comments are much weaker and shorter on these than on eternal justification; they also stand in contradiction and opposition to what he has earlier stated.

And for this reason faith itself is fruit and effect of our justification; while it is also true that, for us, justification begins to exist only as a result of our faith. [Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, (1900), p367-372]

Herman Hoeksema:

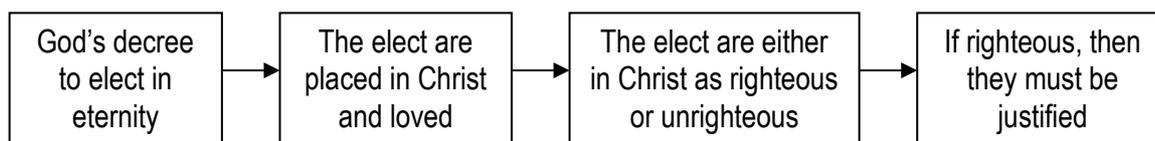
- *We are justified in the decree of election from before the foundation of the world.* [Reformed Dogmatics, RFPA, (1985) p502.]
- *It is of eternity, not of time, of the counsel of God, not of its realisation in us, that the apostle is speaking [Rm 8:30]. And well may he speak thus. Not only because the counsel of God is certain of fulfilment, so that, when the Almighty determines anything it is the same as if it were all accomplished; but still more so because the thoughts of God's heart and mind are the ultimate reality of all things. With God the calling and justification and glorification of the brethren of the First Born are accomplished facts, real in His unchangeable and eternal counsel. With Him, in His divine mind, there is from all eternity a beloved, predestinated, called, justified and glorified people...*
- [And yet Hoeksema says:] ... *We are justified in time. For we are born in sin and guilt, are by nature the children of wrath, have no right to be called the children of God, no right to the inheritance of glory with the First Born Son of God. But He justifies us. He makes us partakers of the adoption unto children and heirs, of the forgiveness of sins and causes us, by the testimony of the indwelling spirit to cry out: Abba, Father! He justifies us, by implanting us in the Lord Jesus Christ, causing us to be one plant with Him, by faith working through love. And He it is, too, that glorifies us in the end.* [Herman Hoeksema, 'Foreknown in Love', *Standard Bearer*, 15 June 1930]

David Engelsma:

says that eternal justification is not merely the decree of God in His eternal counsel, that He would justify all the members of Christ; but rather a decree forgiving sins, imputing righteousness, adopting as sons. [David J. Engelsma, *Dogmatics class notes*, Protestant Reformed Seminary, Soteriology locus, Spring 2004. (Quoted from *The Doctrine of Eternal Justification in light of the Westminster Tradition*, John P. Marcus, *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, Vol. 38.1, p43)]

G. H. Kersten: *Not one who is Reformed can deny justification before faith. That is, from eternity in the decree of God.* [G. H. Kersten, *Reformed Dogmatics*, tr. J. R. Beeke and J. C. Weststrate, Eerdmans (1983) p419. (Quoted from Marcus)]

All these essentially hold to a decree that actually, rather than 'in principle', justifies before faith is received, but also affirm that justification is revealed in time by faith. Their argument can be formulated as follows:



A Biblical analysis

In dealing with this subject we have to be very clear what we mean, it is plain that confusion is caused by different men ascribing differing meanings to the same phrases. This is shown by pro and contra eternal justification writers using supporting quotes from

Thomas Goodwin, who although he spoke of eternal justification, clearly held to a triple application of justification as argued for in this paper.

Firstly, all agree that: **It is God that justifies**, (Rm 8:34). All are opposed to Roman ideas about justification. Instead, all teach that justification of the elect is the fulfilment of the divine decree in Christ to remit sins by Christ blood, discharge them from condemnation, and account them as righteous through Christ's resurrection whereby his righteousness is imputed to them.

Secondly, although the term 'eternal justification' or the phrase 'justification from eternity' is unbiblical, it is right to speak of a justification envisioned in eternity since God decreed that the elect would be justified. He not only purposed that they should be justified, but since he saw them as placed in Christ and beloved (Eph 1:4-5) he also saw them as justified in his sight. From God's point of view the elect were justified and included in Christ.³

But this is because God is outside of time; he sees the end from the beginning. In the sphere of God (eternity) all things are seen as accomplished and complete; all is now. But in the material dimension of time this does not apply. Men cannot be justified until they have faith in Christ's work. They cannot be actually justified, or have the benefits of justification applied to them. Likewise God sees the wicked on earth as damned, but they are not in hell yet.

Similarly, God sees the complete restored creation and all the elect united with Christ from his vantage point outside time; but to us the world is ravaged and in travail while many saints have not yet even been born. It would be wrong and foolish to state that the creation is in harmony and restored. So it is with justification. God sees it in eternal terms, in terms where time has no restrictions; we do not for we are material creatures bound by time.⁴

From man's side scripture tells us that we were alienated from God, enemies of God and dead in trespasses and sins. Until we received faith and believed we had no experience of justification. Thus, there are at three aspects to the timing of justification:

1. The decree to justify on the basis of a substitutionary death. (Sometimes called active or objective justification.) This is outside of time - not in the past!
2. The accomplishment of the decree through Christ's atonement.
3. The application of the atonement to individuals by faith to complete the decree. (Sometimes called passive or subjective justification.)

<p>The decree Active Justification</p>

<p>The Cross Atonement accomplished Redemption purchased</p>

<p>Application to men's hearts Passive Justification Righteousness imputed</p>

³ As Thomas Goodwin (quoted by Gill), *'Justified then we were when first elected, though not in our own persons, yet in our Head, as he had our persons then given him, and we came to have a being and an interest in him'*. [Works, vol. 4. part 1. p. 105, 106] God, in the everlasting transaction with Christ, *'told him, as it were, that he would look for his debt and satisfaction of him, and that he did let the sinners go free; and so they are in this respect, justified from all eternity.'* [Ibid., quoted in Gill, Body of Divinity, Book 2, chap. 5, sec. 2.].

⁴ Gill understood this, showing that eternity is neither before or after time but is always present whether time is or not.

The first occurred in eternity; the second took place in time past, at the cross; while the third occurs at the moment of regeneration. At the cross the elect were legally and corporately justified through union in Christ's death, but at conversion the elect had the work of Christ applied to them personally through the instrument of faith.

So, is justification eternal? Yes and no must be the answer. It has an eternal aspect in God's decree, but a temporal aspect in the accomplishment in the individual. It is eternal from God's viewpoint and temporal from man's.

Thus actual justification is a transient act of God (*actus transiens*) while the decree of God to justify is an immanent act (*actus immanens*). The decree to justify is not actual or applied justification.

Analogies

The same thing applies to conversion. From eternity God viewed the elect as converted, as new creatures in his Son. Since his love was upon them from the beginning, his eyes saw them as united with Christ; nothing outside his Son is loved by God. But does this mean that the elect were converted before they were born? Of course not. Conversion requires the gift of faith and the grace of repentance. These could not be given until gained at the cross and applied by the Spirit individually in time. A person is converted when he believes and before this his state is:

- Alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works (Col 1:21).
- We were enemies (Rm 5:9).
- Dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1).
- Aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world (Eph 2:1).
- Strangers and foreigners (Eph 2:19).

Let's also take the case of glorification. Teachers of eternal justification often insist that believers were glorified and made holy in eternity (e.g. Don Fortner, *New Focus*, Vol. 9.4, p8ff). It is true that believers are glorified, in that 'grace is glory begun' (as Matthew Henry, see also 1 Pt 5:1), without a new nature in the glory seated with Christ we would have no prayer life. Yet it is foolish to state that glorification is completed; we still have an old nature that sins and a body that dies. Glorification is not complete until the Second Coming, **When Christ *who is our life* appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory** (Col 3:4).

While the Spirit of glory rests upon us (Jn 17:22; 1 Pt 4:14) and we manifest that Spirit in joyful suffering (1 Pt 1:8), the full manifestation of glory is future:

- We are called to glory after a time of suffering here (1 Pt 5:10).
- The crown of glory is yet to be received (1 Pt 5:4).
- God's glory is yet to be revealed (1 Pt 4:13).

The glorification of God's people was decreed in eternity, a measure of glory is applied in time but the fulness is to be revealed in the future.

Justification is the same. It was decreed in eternity but was not fully applied until after the cross. We cannot say that justification was completed in eternity since it had not been effectively applied to the individual elect members in time.

Another example is the unity of the church. When God decreed election, he saw the church as a body of unified believers complete in Christ and in perfect union with him and each other. Yet Christ, while on earth prayed for this unity to be completed as a result of the

cross (Jn 17:21); further, it is clear that the fragmentation and divisions that disrupt the church on earth are hardly evidence of complete harmony and unity today. The true unification of the church is a present spiritual reality (in answer to Christ's prayer) and a future material reality that will be manifest at the Second Coming.

We can tabulate this as follows:

Justification in eternity The decree of God to justify the elect.	Justification at the cross The accomplishment of the means of justification - atonement.	Justification in time The application of Christ's work to actually justify believers.
Elect seen as justified in God's plan since he is outside time.	All the elect justified legally in the Spirit.	The elect begin to enjoy the actual benefits of justification.
The elect viewed as sons in Christ.	The elect corporately made sons in Christ.	The elect are individually adopted into God's family.

This threefold application of God's eternal decrees in time and eternity is necessary to understand the process of human salvation. Some theologians have also asserted this using the following terms:

1. *Decretive*, relating to God's eternal plan.
2. *Virtual*, regarding the accomplishment made by the atonement of Christ.
3. *Actual*, the application of the benefits of salvation gained by Christ's redemption. The enabling in humans by the Spirit.

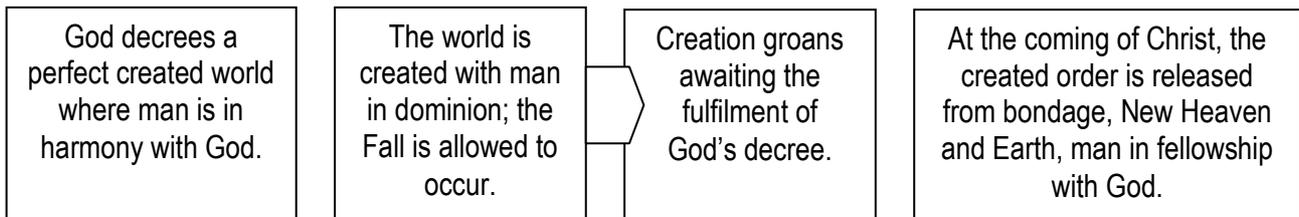
This process of justification, as applied to men, is also in accordance with the characteristics of each member of the Trinity in the role of salvation:

Decretive In eternity	Virtual At the Cross	Actual In time at regeneration
The role of the Father who initiates and commands salvation.	The role of the Son who procures salvation.	The role of the Spirit who applies salvation.

Examples of this:

Decretive	Virtual ⁵	Actual ⁶
Righteousness decreed	Righteousness gained	Righteousness imputed
Forgiveness decreed	Forgiveness purchased	Forgiveness applied
Redemption decreed	Redemption paid	The elect set free in time
The incarnation decreed: the Son will become man.	Christ incarnated and fulfils the work of redemption as a man.	The benefits of Christ's work are applied to the elect.

This process complies with other objective features of God's decree:



The effects of the cross

What Fortner and others signally fail to do justice to are the effects of the cross. Before the cross we were in Adam; we had no new nature but were lost in the old man. We are only taken out of Adam by the cross. We only receive a new nature and become a new creature when we die with Christ and are raised with Christ. It is this nature which is justified and righteous in God's sight, not the old man, not the Adamic life.

Now it matters little whether we understand this as affecting us in principle at Calvary as a corporate body, or when we actually come into the good of this by faith when we trust in Christ. Either way, the benefits do not occur in eternity but in time.

If Fortner insists that we are truly righteous, are holy, are God's sons before the cross or before we were born, then he could be accused of saying that the old Adamic nature was considered as righteous and justified before God. This is a serious heresy since it nullifies the cross and makes the work of Christ unnecessary. Why the cross if God views Adam as righteous and holy? But in fact, scripture tells us that the Adamic nature is cursed and full of iniquity. If he counters this by saying that he only has in mind the elect as seen in Christ not Adam, then his theology ignores the whole matter of man created, placed in Adam, cursed and lost in sin. If the elect are actually and fully righteous in Christ from eternity, why did God bother to create them at all? The answer is that God wants a material but perfect humanity to share in his glory. Material creation requires the cross and justification in time.

Crucial scriptural evidence

If eternal justification is as complete as certain writers teach, then we have a clear contradiction between this doctrine and the plain statements of scripture.

⁵ 'Virtual' here is as applied to men. At the resurrection Christ himself was actually justified (1 Tim 3:16), that is declared righteous. Another way of explaining this text is to see it as the justification of Christ's true righteous nature in the Spirit while on earth he seemed to be as a normal man in the flesh (c.f. Rm 1:3-4). The resurrection would then be just one means of showing that Christ was truly righteous, along with his human testimony of words and works, plus his supernatural baptism and transfiguration.

⁶ Perhaps 'applied' may be a better term since many theologians place actual justification at the cross and resurrection of Christ.

The demonstration of God's character

- But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. (Rm 3:21-22).
- Christ Jesus, whom God set forth *as* a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness (Rm 3:25).
- to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rm 3:36).

God's character (of righteousness) is demonstrated by the propitiation of the cross. This is not said to be a revelation of his decree or of an existing justification of men. God shows us that he loves us by sending Jesus to achieve a justification for us through his life and death.

God's righteousness is revealed through faith in Jesus. There can be no actual justification until Jesus accomplished propitiation.

God demonstrates his character of righteousness **at the present time** in justifying those who believe in time. Actual justification occurs in time. (Rm 3:26).

The focus of God's purpose in humanity occurs at the cross, the centre point of time. An actual justification before this date diverts focus away from Christ and the cross in God's dealings with man. This is contrary to the spirit of the entire apostolic writings. Before the cross the world waited for the promised deliverer who would bring justification and atonement; after the cross we pass into the last time when God has provided a Son, the heir of all things, who brought eternal life and immortality to light (Heb 1:1-3; 2 Tim 1:10).

[God] who has saved us and called *us* with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, *who* has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Tim 1:9-10)

Grace was allotted, or earmarked, to us in God's purpose in eternity; but the actual application of that is by a holy calling in time and the abolition of death and bringing forth of eternal life through the cross and resurrection of Jesus in time. Salvation follows the cross and God's calling.

Justification can only be effective after Christ's resurrection

It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offences, and was raised because of our justification (Rm 4:24-25).

The benefits of justification cannot be applied to the elect until Christ had died and been resurrected.

Actual justification occurs after Christ's blood was shed

Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him (Rm 5:9).

Christ's blood was shed in time and the full benefits of justification could not be applied until that blood was spilled. [Regarding the situation of OT saints, see footnote 7 later.]

[God] has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son ... when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb 1:2-3)

Jesus actually purged sins in time. The sin problem could only be dealt with after the revelation of God's Son in time. Real pardon from sin, in justification, could only occur after the cross.

Justification in time results from faith in Christ as the instrument of actual justification

- To demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. ... Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith (Rm 3:26-28).
- Faith is accounted for righteousness (Rm 4:5).
- Faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness (Rm 4:9).
- Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God (Rm 5:1).

If man is justified by faith, he cannot be justified before he is born or before he is regenerated. It is wrong to speak of the elect as actually justified in eternity. We are justified by faith not by decree. God decrees that we should benefit from the cross, in time, by faith. It is true that God justifies us by grace (Rm 3:24, 8:33) and that Christ justifies us by his blood and resurrection (Rm 4:25 5:9,19). The faith is not ours, but a gift from God. Yet the instrumental cause of actual justification, under God's sovereign purpose, is faith. Actual justification occurs after the grace of faith grasps the benefits of Christ's blood and resurrection, having Christ's righteousness imputed to him.

Justification by faith was future for the Gentiles

foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith (Gal 3:8).

God promised Abraham that the Gentiles would receive salvation through his line of faith. At that time salvation was not available for the nations but it would become available through Abraham's posterity. The justification of believing Gentiles was future.⁷

Before faith is given to us, we are sinners

- 'There is no difference' in the actual condition of the elect and the wicked until faith comes, 'all have sinned'. (Rm 3:22-23). One is not justified spiritually awaiting faith to reveal it to the conscience.
- Freedom from sin does not come until a death has occurred, **For he who has died has been freed from sin** (Rm 6:7).
- Before faith came we were slaves of sin (Rm 6:20).
- Before the cross and faith, we are considered by God as ungodly, not as holy sons: **When we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly... in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us** (Rm 5:6, 8).

Children of wrath

We all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others (Eph 2:3).

Not only are we stated by the Holy Spirit to not be God's sons nor justified in our unregenerate condition, we are called 'children of wrath', on a path of condemnation until arrested by God's word. Further, we are said to be 'just as the others'; i.e. we are just like the wicked until we are regenerated, far from being righteous or holy.

The benefits of salvation, including justification, must be received in time

- **The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord** (Rm 6:23).

Eternal life is a gift given by God and it comprises justification. A gift has no power until it is actually received, not promised. Until eternal life is received by faith, the fruit of this life (including adoption and justification) are not available. It is wrong to state that a person is justified before this time.

⁷ Note that individual Gentiles who submitted to the God of Israel were accepted in the theocratic community as proselytes, i.e. effectively as Israelites, not as Gentile believers. The word (*ger*) implies sojourning in Israel rather than passing through. In the case of Naaman (2 Kg 5) - who appears to have, at least, made a profession of faith - he carried soil from Israel to symbolically stand in the place of worship as an Israelite. Although the Queen of Sheba blessed the Lord for Solomon's kingdom, there is no indication that she repented. The point remains that there was no salvation outside of Israel.

Freedom from condemnation, righteousness and justification arise after the reception of the Spirit.

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin (Rm 8:1-3).

Release from condemnation is 'now', i.e. in time to those who are been united to Christ by his Spirit. Freedom from sin does not occur until the law of the Spirit of life changes a sinner into a saint. This grace is only fully applicable after the cross, being accomplished, when God sent his Son. Saints could not be said to *be* 'righteous' before this time, but are *declared as righteous* (Rm 4:3).⁸

The flesh and the Spirit

1 *There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,

4 that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those *who live* according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

6 For to be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace.

7 Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

9 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.

10 And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness.

11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

(Rm 8:1-11)

On this passage note the following:

- The essence of justification is release from condemnation (v1), and this is only made available to people who are human but are walking according to the Spirit. This can only occur in time not eternity.
- The fruit of justification is to make free from death; this entails a release from mortality and can only occur in time, for mortals (v2).
- Salvation required God's Son being sent to earth as a man (v3). This happens in time.
- The application of justification by the Spirit (v4) is to people under law - i.e. in time.
- The reception of the Spirit, by whom justification is applied to men (v5-9), is in time.
- Salvation unites us to Christ as humans (v10) and results in the death of the old man. This occurs in time.

⁸ The situation of the OT saints differs from NT saints, not in status but in enjoyment of blessings. The former had their sins covered or passed over in forbearance, awaiting actual remission in time through the propitiation of the future cross (Rm 3:25, 4:7). Righteousness was imputed (accounted) but they did not know the benefits of dying with Christ. This is because they did not receive the Spirit as an indwelling force as the Spirit could not be given until Jesus was glorified (Jn 7:39). The Spirit applies the fulness of eternal life and salvation and imparts the new nature. OT saints longed to look into this prospect of grace imparted, Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the *grace that would come* to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow (1 Pt 1:10-11).

- The power of the resurrection, by which justification occurs, affects mortal men who are, in turn, resurrected (v11). This must happen in time not eternity.

The salvation that Paul describes here can only be effected in time and cannot be actual in eternity.

The Golden Chain links

Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Rm 8:30)

In the Golden Chain of salvation, Paul categorically places calling before justification. Despite the various methods used by writers to explain this away, none of them has any great merit. The word 'called' is the same word Paul uses for our calling elsewhere (even though slightly different from the word used in v28). Neither can the idea of Hebraic inversion be applied here as Paul is clearly listing connected events in order, and is writing to a Gentile city. If justification follows calling, then it occurs (or is completed) in time not in eternity. People cannot be called before they exist.

Conclusion

It is clearly an error to teach that we had actually obtained all the benefits, including justification, in eternity. Eph 1 teaches that we have all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ, but it does not say that we had those blessings available to us before we were even born. Indeed, Paul states that we were predestined to adoption (the corollary of justification), which means that it had not occurred in the past but would occur in time. He chose us in Christ, and viewed all the elect as being in him but the elect were not organically placed in him since they had not yet been born. He was our surety, our guarantee. We were considered as being in Christ in principle so that we could be loved, but the benefits of union with Christ (including justification) would only come in time after the cross and after faith.

The real cause of error in the idea of actual eternal justification is to confuse justification with election. The choosing of God in the eternal decree is according to God's good pleasure; it does not necessitate an impartation of spiritual blessing on the elect before they were born, but the determination to bless them in time. That God can do this with justice is due to the fact that he is outside of time and sees the end from the beginning. But we are different, we have to benefit from the effects of the cross and faith in time to receive God's grace.

Everywhere, scripture asserts the following:

- Before our conversion we were children of wrath and lost in trespasses and sins - therefore we were not considered righteous and holy.
- Justification was made actual to us when we exercised the faith that God gave us by grace. We were not actually justified before then.
- Upon being justified we received the grace of adoption. We were not considered as God's children before that time but were under wrath.

The notion of eternal actual justification is caused by the desire to be overly metaphysical about eternal matters in the Godhead that are reserved for the wisdom of God and are beyond us. In matters such as these we must stick resolutely to scriptural statements and not venture into mystical extrapolation. Theological extrapolations that contradict straightforward scriptures, especially apostolic statements, must be avoided.

Appendix One

Argued Texts

He has not observed iniquity in Jacob, nor has He seen wickedness in Israel. The LORD his God *is* with him, and the shout of a King *is* among them. (Num 23:21)

Some theologians use this verse as support for an eternal justification that is complete. Even Hoeksema gives this impression, using this verse and Rm 8:29-30 in *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.502. Speaking of a sinful Israel, God's son, the verse suggests that God sees no sin in him. But, although prompted by God, the word comes from the apostate Balaam. Yet a greater difficulty is that this is not what the original says. The LXX is closer to the original Hebrew when it states:

There shall not be trouble in Jacob, neither shall sorrow be seen in Israel: the Lord his God *is* with him, the glories of rulers *are* in him. (Num 23:21; LXX trans. Brenton)

On this matter note:

אָבֵן AVEN not only signifies iniquity, but most frequently trouble, labour, distress, and affliction; and these indeed are its ideal meanings, and iniquity is only an accommodated or metaphorical one, because of the pain, distress, etc., produced by sin. עֲמַל AMAL, translated here perverseness, occurs often in Scripture, but is never translated perverseness except in this place. It signifies simply labour, especially that which is of an afflictive or oppressive kind. The words may therefore be considered as implying that God will not suffer the people either to be exterminated by the sword, or to be brought under a yoke of slavery. Either of these methods of interpretation gives a good sense, but our common version (KJV) gives none.

Adam Clarke, Bible Comm. in loc.

5. That God sees no sin in believers, whatever sins they commit, is false, even when claimed under the colour of Scripture. For in Numbers 23.21- 'He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, nor seen perverseness in Israel', the original reads: 'He hath not beheld wrong against Jacob, nor hath He seen grievance against Israel.' That is, says Gataker, God did not approve of the wrongs done by others to His people. The whole context, and especially Balaam's advice to Balak, to draw them into sin so that God would forsake them, confirms this. As for Jeremiah 50.20 - 'The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found' - it means that even their sins shall not lead God to punish them forever.

Besides, God sees everything about us all, both good and evil. (Prov 15.3) Furthermore, He is highly displeased with His people's sins; witness David's adultery and murder (2 Sam 11.27) and presumptuous attendance at the Lord's Supper in Corinth. (1 Cor 11.32).

John Flavel, appendix to *Vindiciarum Vindex*; paraphrased in *Peace and Truth*, 2004:1.

A slightly different view is adopted by Keil and Delitzsch

God sees not אָבֵן, worthlessness, wickedness, and עֲמַל, tribulation, misery, as the consequence of sin, and therefore discovers no reason for cursing the nation. That this applied to the people solely by virtue of their calling as the holy nation of

Jehovah, and consequently that there is no denial of the sin of individuals, is evident from the second hemistich, which expresses the thought of the first in a positive form: so that the words, 'Jehovah his God is with him,' correspond to the words, 'He beholds not wickedness;' and 'the shout of a king in the midst of it,' to His not seeing suffering. Israel therefore rejoiced in the blessing of God only so long as it remained faithful to the idea of its divine calling, and continued in covenant fellowship with the Lord

Commentary on the Old Testament, in. loc.

In conclusion we can say that this is a poor verse to use as a support for the doctrine of complete eternal justification.

3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,

4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,

5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.

Eph 1:3-6

On this note:

- This passage is a definitive statement regarding God's plan of redemption, not a description of what had already transpired.
- The spiritual blessings are in heavenly places in Christ, but no mention is made of timing here.
- We were chosen in eternity for a future experience of holiness. **That we should be**, is an infinitive of purpose associated with the accusative of general reference. The same adjectives appear in Colossians, **and you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight (Col 1:21-22).** Note that here the presentation of the elect as holy is a result of the cross.
- Our adoption is predestined by God in eternity. This means that it takes place in time, as it was predestined to. If it had already occurred, it could not be predestined to occur in time. The Greek word **proorizw** [*proorizo* Strong's 4309] means 'to decide beforehand', to 'foreordain'. In other words, the decree to adoption or to justify was made before the actual justification. The decree was in eternity, the actual completion is in time.

God, who has saved us and called *us* with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, *who* has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,

2 Tim 1:9-10

Advocates of eternal justification emphasise verse 9 where grace is said to be, **given to us in Christ Jesus before time began**. But we have no quibble with this; grace was given to the elect in God's decree and purpose in eternity. The chosen were granted to receive faith in time. This is actually emphasised by verse 10: what God purposed in eternity is now revealed in

time by Christ and his cross, who brings the effect of the decree (eternal life) to actually bear on those who have faith. The Gospel is the revealed fulness of God's decree to save in eternity. The Gospel is the purpose of God made manifest. The Gospel is the actuality, the decree is the purpose and the cross is the virtuality for the whole body.

All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Rev 13:8

Again this is referring to God's purpose, as emphasised by the reference to God's book of election in eternity. The Son of God was not slain before he was made man.

He was slain in the Father's eternal counsels. [Jamieson, Fausset & Brown, *Comm.*]

The meaning here is, not that he was actually put to death 'from the foundation of the world,' but that the intention to give him for a sacrifice was formed then ... The purpose was so certain, it was so constantly represented by bloody sacrifices from the earliest ages, all typifying the future Saviour, that it might be said that he was 'slain from the foundation of the world.' [Albert Barnes Notes]

Referring to the blood of Christ, Peter says, He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you (1 Pt 1:20).

In fact, Rev 13:8 cannot be interpreted in the way implied by the KJV, which approaches Gnosticism. The phrase, 'from the foundation of the world' qualifies the saints of v7 whose names are written in the book of life, not 'Christ'. [See Robertson's Word Pictures.] The same phrase is used of saints in Rev 17:8. More accurate is the New American Standard translation, and all who dwell on the earth will worship him, *everyone* whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain. This translation is also used in the ASV, Darby Version, Bible in Basic English, NRSV and RSV. Dislike of these translations ought not to prejudice exegesis.

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Rm 8:29-30

The crucial matter here is that justification occurs between two temporal acts: *calling* and *glorification*; acts that begin in time and continue into eternity. The items here that are in eternity past are *foreknowledge* and *predestination*. From these eternal acts flow: *calling*, *justification* and *glorification* in time.

John Gill's attempt to invert the order based on Hebraic precedent is an extreme fabrication. Paul is writing to a Gentile city in Greek for a start. No sound commentator has ever reversed this order, in my reading at least. The common sense reading is to understand it simply as it is written, indeed that seems to be Paul's specific point, salvation in time flows from God's eternal counsels, and these were based on sovereign love (And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose, v28)

Fortner's attempt to make the verb 'called' to mean something different from calling elsewhere is also fallacious. 'Called' here is *kaleo* (Strong's 2564) meaning primarily: to call aloud, to utter in a loud voice; secondarily: to call by name or to give a name or to receive a name, to be called in the sense of bearing a name or title, or even to be saluted by name. In the KJV the sense is primarily to call (125 times) or bid (16 times); the sense of to be named is used once or possibly twice (with another word added). The verb *kaleo* is closely related to the other main words used for our formal calling by the Gospel: the noun *klesis* (Strong's 2821, e.g. Rm 11:29) and the adjective *kletos* (Strong's 2822, e.g. Rm 8:28); indeed *klesis* / *kletos* derive from *kaleo*. [There are many other Greek words used to indicate call, calling, called, but most of these are variants of *kaleo* with a prefix - such as *eiskaleo*, to call in, invite.]

That *kaleo* is used as a normal word for Gospel calling is seen in the following:

- Romans 9:24 *even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?*
- Romans 9:7 *nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called."*
- Romans 9:26 *... There they shall be called sons of the living God.*
- 1 Corinthians 1:9 *God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*
- Corinthians 7:17 *But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk.*
- 2 Timothy 1:9 *... who has saved us and called (*kaleo*) us with a holy calling (*klesis*).*
- 2 Thessalonians 2:14 *to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Dozens more examples could be supplied; indeed *kaleo* is the prime verb used for 'calling'.

Fortner insists that it means 'named' here and is referring to the actual act of formal adoption as sons in eternity: *The word that is translated called in Romans 8:28 means "invited, summoned, or selected." But that is not the word translated "called" used in Romans 8:30 and 2 Tim 1:9. The word translated "called" in these verses means "named, made to bear a name, or saluted by a name. In old eternity the Lord God called all His elect the sons of God, and named us as His sons.* [New Focus, Vol. 9 No. 4, p8] His argument is thus: 'called' in Rm 8:30 means 'named' and is speaking of the adoption that took place in eternity, therefore all these items occurred in eternity past.

This is simply untrue and very bad scholarship.

- The verb *Kaleo*, the noun *klesis* and the adjective *kletos* are closely related, the latter two being derived from the verb and all derived from the root word *kal*.
 - 2 Timothy 1:9 actually contains both words.
 - Fortner's definition of *kaleo* in Rm 8:30 ignores the primary sense and emphasises the secondary sense, failing to mention that the overwhelming use in the KJV is 'to call'.
 - Fortner is trying to make a great difference between two Greek words, one of which (v28) is the adjectival form and the other being the verb form (v30) of the same basic word.
 - The 'calling', mentioned in Rm 8:30, is a calling that occurs in time. This is the overwhelming exegesis of almost every sound scholar. Even Gill doesn't use this approach.
 - This being the case, justification, which follows calling, also occurs in time.
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Appendix Two

Quotes from eminent theologians

The Westminster Confession

God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect; and Christ did, in the fulness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification: nevertheless they are not justified, until the Holy Spirit doth in due time actually apply Christ unto them.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, 11.4.

It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man; the Prophet, Priest, and King; the Head and Saviour of his Church; the Heir of all things; and Judge of the world; unto whom he did from all eternity give a people to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, 8.1.

Francis Turretin

The decree of justification is one thing; justification itself another -- as the will to save and sanctify is one thing; salvation and sanctification itself another. The will or decree to justify certain persons is indeed eternal and precedes faith itself, but actual justification takes place in time and follows faith.

Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 2; P&R Publishing, (1994), p683.

GC Berkouwer

The concept of eternal justification reveals how speculative logic can invade a scriptural proclamation of salvation and torture it beyond recognition.

The fault of the thinking ... lies in this, that it robs the divine revelation of its unique and saving significance and devaluates the historical character of the activity of God. When speculation on time and eternity, with eternity swallowing up the significance of time, determines the line of thought, there is no possibility of doing justice to such mysteries as the incarnation and redemption - or to justification through faith within the temporal reality of our lives.

It lost its grasp on the fact that God pronounces his judgment of justification in the way of faith through the preaching of redemption within our temporal existence. The reality of justification in time must never be by-passed via a speculative train of thought concerning eternity. He who allows justification and redemption to ascend out of time into eternity is never again able to avoid the fatal conclusion that everything occurring in time merely formalises or illustrates what has been moulded in eternal quietness.

G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Justification*, Eerdmans (1963), p150-151.

Charles Buck

As to the time of justification, divines are not agreed. Some have distinguished it into decretive, virtual, and actual

1. Decretive, is God's eternal purpose to justify sinners in time by Jesus Christ.
2. Virtual justification has a reference to the satisfaction made by Christ.
3. Actual, is, when we are enabled to believe in Christ, and by faith are united to him.

Others say it is eternal, because his purpose respecting it was from everlasting: and that, as the Almighty viewed his people in Christ, they were, of consequence, justified in his sight. But it appears to me, that the principle on which the advocates for this doctrine have proceeded is wrong. They have confounded the design with the execution; for if this distinction be not kept up, the utmost perplexity will follow the consideration of every subject which relates to the decrees of God; nor shall we be able to form any clear ideas of his moral government whatever. To say, as one does, that the eternal will of God to justify men is the justification of them, is not to the purpose; for, upon the same ground, we might as well say that the eternal will of God to convert and glorify his people is the real conversion and glorification of them. That it was eternally determined that there should be a people who should believe in Christ, and that his righteousness should be imputed to them, is not to be disputed; but to say that these things were really done from eternity (which we must say if we believe eternal justification,) this would be absurd. It is more consistent to believe, that God from eternity laid the plan of justification; that this plan was executed by the life and death of Christ; and that the blessing is only manifested, received, and enjoyed, when we are regenerated; so that no man can say or has any reason to conclude, he is justified, until he believes in Christ, Rom. v. 1.

Buck's Theological Dict. (Emphasis PF)

James Petigru Boyce

VII. The Time of Justification

We may finally inquire into the time at which justification occurs.

1. It does not occur periodically but is a single act, and not one repeated with reference to new sins. This arises from its nature as an act of God declaring the relation of the believer to the law and from the ground of that act, the never failing merits of Christ. The pardon which the Christian seeks of God is that of a child for offences against a father's love, and not of a culprit before an avenging judge. The sufferings which Christians endure are not avenging punishments for sin, but chastisements from a Father who chastises those whom he loves and scourges those whom he receives.
2. It is an instantaneous and not a continuing work as is sanctification. It is God's act declaring the sinner's relation to the law. That sinner is under condemnation until justified. As soon as justified his condemnation ceases. He cannot be partly condemned and partly justified. He is under condemnation until brought into that condition which secures his justification. When that moment comes God must justify.
3. But when is that moment? The Scriptures teach that it is when man believes. It is in the moment of trust in a personal Saviour.

It was not at the time that Christ finished his work and laid the foundation of justification in his merits and satisfaction. By these justification was secured but not bestowed. It was not in Eternity as is Election by which the subjects of the future justification were chosen. It is at the moment of belief when faith, which is its condition, is experienced. Then is consummated that which was purposed in eternity and which was made possible and certain by the work of Christ. The hour of faith was even the period of justification before the incarnation of Christ because of the faith which rested personally upon him through

the promises of God, and the acceptance by God of the meritorious work of Christ as though already existing because of the absolute certainty that it would be performed.

James Petigru Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, c. 35, VII.

AA Hodge

19. Are the sins of believers, committed subsequently to their justification, included in the pardon which is consequent to the imputation of Christ's righteousness; and if so, in what way ?

The elect, although embraced in the purpose of God, and in his covenant with his Son from eternity, are not effectively united to Christ until the time of their regeneration, when, in consequence of their union with him, and the imputation of his righteousness to them, their relation to the law is permanently changed. Although the immutable law always continues their perfect standard of experience and of action, it is no longer to them a condition of the covenant of life, because that covenant has been fully discharged for them by, their sponsor. God no longer imputes sin to them to the end of judicial punishment. Every suffering which they henceforth endure is of the nature of chastisement, designed for their correction and improvement, and forms in its relation to them, no part of the penalty of the law.

A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, (CD ROM version, Escondido, CA: Ephesians Four Group) 1999; c33. [Emphasis PF]

John Calvin

But it ought to be remembered, as I already observed, that the gift of justification is not separated from regeneration, though the two things are distinct. [Book 3, c.11, p.830]

When puny man endeavours to penetrate to the hidden recesses of the divine wisdom, and goes back even to the remotest eternity, in order that he may understand what final determination God has made with regard to him. In this way he plunges headlong into an immense abyss, involves himself in numberless inextricable snares, and buries himself in the thickest darkness. [Book 3, c. 24, p.1078-9]

But if, out of all controversy, the righteousness of Christ, and thereby life, is ours by communication, it follows that both of these were lost in Adam that they might be recovered in Christ, whereas sin and death were brought in by Adam, that they might be abolished in Christ. [Book 2, c.1, 5, p.298]

Thus it appears how true it is that we are justified not without, and yet not by works, since in the participation of Christ, by which we are justified, is contained not less sanctification than justification. [Book 3, c. 16, 1, p.896]

For how does true faith justify unless by uniting us to Christ, so that being made one with him, we may be admitted to a participation in his righteousness? [Alternate translation: For how does true faith justify, but by uniting us to Christ, being made one with him, we may participate His righteousness. Book 3, c. 17, 11, p.915]

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Ages CD Rom,

John Owen

All the elect of God were, in his eternal purpose and design, and in the everlasting covenant between the Father and the Son, committed unto him, to be delivered from sin, the law, and death, and to be brought into the enjoyment of God: “Thine they were, and thou gavest them me,” John 17:6. Hence was that love of his unto them wherewith he loved them, and gave himself for them, antecedently unto any good or love in them, Ephesians 5:25, 26; Galatians 2:20; Revelation 1:5, 6.

(5.) In the prosecution of this design of God, and in the accomplishment of the everlasting covenant, in the fullness of time he took upon him our nature, or took it into personal subsistence with himself. [p.265-266]

And this, although it [the New Covenant] have the nature of an eternal decree, yet is it not the same with the decree of election, as some suppose: for that properly respects the subjects or persons for whom grace and glory are prepared; [p.278]

John Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, Ages CD Rom (1995).

AW Pink

Above, we have pointed out that from the viewpoint of God’s eternal decrees the question “Who are the ones whom God justifies?” must be “the elect.” And this brings us to a point on which some eminent Calvinists have erred, or at least, have expressed themselves faultily. Some of the older theologians, when expounding this doctrine, contended for the *eternal justification* of the elect, affirming that God pronounced them righteous before the foundation of the world, and that their justification was then actual and complete, remaining so throughout their history in time, even during the days of their unregeneracy and unbelief; and that the only difference their faith made was in *making manifest* God’s eternal justification in their consciences. This is a serious mistake, resulting (again) from failure to distinguish between things which differ.

As an *immanent* act of God’s mind, in which *all* things (which are to us past, present, and future) were cognized by Him, the elect might be said to be justified from all eternity. And, as an *immutable* act of God’s will, which cannot be frustrated, the same may be predicated again. But as an actual, formal, historical sentence, pronounced by God upon us, not so. We must distinguish between God’s looking upon the elect in the *purpose* of his grace, and the objects of justification lying under the sentence of the law: in the former, He loved His people with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3); in the latter, we were “by nature the children of *wrath*, even as others” (Ephesians 2:3). Until they believe, every descendant of Adam is “condemned already” (John 3:18), and to be under God’ condemnation is the very opposite of being justified.

AW Pink, *The Doctrine of Election*, Ages CD Rom, p47-48

Scripture knows no such thing as a justified unbeliever. There is nothing meritorious about believing, yet it is necessary in order to justification. It is not only the righteousness of Christ *as imputed* which justifies, but also *as received* (Romans 5:11, 17). The righteousness of Christ is not mine until I accept it as the Father’s gift.

AW Pink, *The Doctrine of Election*, Ages CD Rom, p61

Thomas Goodwin

1. In the everlasting covenant. We may say of all spiritual blessings in Christ, what is said of Christ Himself, that their 'goings forth are from everlasting.' Justified then we were when first elected, though not in our own persons, yet in our Head (Ephesians 1:3).
2. There is a farther act of justifying us, which passed from God towards us in Christ, upon His payment and performance at His resurrection (Romans 4:25, 1 Timothy 3:16).
3. But these two acts of justification are wholly out of us, immanent acts in God, and though they concern us and are *towards* us, yet not acts of God *upon* us, they being performed towards us not as actually existing in ourselves, but only as existing in our Head, who covenanted for us and represented us: so as though by those acts we are *estated* into a right and title to justification, yet the benefit and possession of that estate we have not without a farther act being passed upon us.

[Before regeneration we are justified by existing in our Head only, as a feoffee (*one who is given a grant*), held in trust for us, as children under age. In addition to which, we] are to be in our own persons, though still through Christ, possessed of it, and to have all the deeds and evidences of it committed to the custody and apprehension of our faith. We are in our own persons made true owners and enjoyers of it, which is immediately done at that instant when we first believe; which act (of God) is the completion and accomplishment of the former two, and is that grand and famous justification by faith which the Scripture so much inculcates—note the 'now' in Romans 5:9, 11; 8:11... God doth judge and pronounce His elect ungodly and unjustified till they believe.

Thomas Goodwin, from *Justifying Faith*, quoted by Pink in *Justification* p48-49. [Vol 4 PF]

That which brings a person into a state of justification, according to the rules of the word, is done by God upon believing, and until then a man remains under condemnation, and may truly say, God will not, not cannot own him to be a justified person.

It is in vain to say, I am justified by faith only in respect to the court of mine own conscience. It is in vain to say that a man's apprehension and faith that he was justified from eternity, is all that justification which the Scripture so constantly speaks of to be by and upon believing; for according to that opinion, a man was as much justified before he believed as after. And his faith would add nothing new to his state, but only his apprehension of it; whereas Scripture speaks of a man's justification by faith as of a real thing, and as a thing done anew... [resulting in peace with God and access to grace]. p214

That act [of faith] is not, nor cannot be, an assurance of our being justified. p 215

Thomas Goodwin, *The Objects and Acts of Justifying Faith*, Banner of Truth (1985), p214-215.

John Flavel

That the elect are not justified from eternity is clear, because although their justification is purposed in eternity, it is not purchased and applied until time. We are justified by Christ's blood and by faith. (Rom. 5.9,1) The elect sinner is not freed from condemnation nor justified till he is united to Christ, which union is by faith, and takes place during the elect's life-time. It is both irrational and unscriptural to imagine that men can be justified before they exist. God's purpose or intention to justify them is not the same as His actually justifying them. Besides, John 3.18 expressly declares that only "he that believeth in Him

(Christ) is not condemned." Furthermore, in the great chain of salvation mentioned in Romans 8.30, the elect are first predestined and called before they are justified. Lastly, it is highly derogatory to Christ to teach eternal justification, for men had to be lost before He could save them. Justification is the fruit of His meritorious death and satisfaction given to justice. Justification is not, therefore, from eternity.

John Flavel, appendix to *Vindiciarum Vindex*; paraphrased in *Peace and Truth*, 2004:1.

William Ames

The judgment was, first, conceived in the mind of God in a decree of justification, Gal 3:8. Second, it was pronounced in Christ our head as he rose from the dead. 2 Cor 5:19. Third, it is pronounced in actuality upon that first relationship which is created when faith is born. Rm 8:1. Fourth, it is expressly pronounced by the Spirit of God witnessing to our spirits our reconciliation with God. Rm 5:5. This testimony of the Spirit is not properly justification in itself, but rather an actual perceiving of what has been given before as if in a reflected act of faith. [p161]

This justification comes about ... because Christ is apprehended by faith, which follows calling as an effect. Faith precedes justification as the instrumental cause. [p162]

The Marrow of Theology, Baker (1997) Chap. 27.

CH Spurgeon

But there are one or two acts of God which, while they certainly are decreed as much as other things, yet they bear such a special relation to God's predestination that it is rather difficult to say whether they were done in eternity or whether they were done in time. *Election* is one of those things which were done absolutely in eternity; all who were elect, were elect as much in eternity as they are in time. But you may say, "Does the like affirmation apply to *adoption* or justification?" My late eminent and now glorified predecessor, Dr. Gill, diligently studying these doctrines, said that adoption was the act of God in eternity, and that as all believers were elect in eternity, so beyond a doubt they were adopted in eternity. He went further than that to include the doctrine of justification and he said that inasmuch as Jesus Christ was before all worlds justified by his Father, and accepted by him as our representative, therefore all the elect must have been justified in Christ from before all worlds.

Now, I believe there is a great deal of truth in what he said, though there was a considerable outcry raised against him at the time he first uttered it. However, that being a high and mysterious point, we would have you accept the doctrine that all those who are saved at last were elect in eternity when the means as well the end were determined. With regard to adoption, I believe we were predestined hereunto in eternity, but I do think there are some points with regard to adoption which will not allow me to consider the act of adoption to have been completed in eternity. For instance, the positive translation of my soul from a state of nature into a state of grace is a part of adoption or at least it is an effect at it, and so close an effect that it really seems to be a part of adoption itself: I believe that this was designed, and in fact that it was virtually carried out in God's everlasting covenant; but I think that it was that actually then brought to pass in all its fullness.

So with regard to justification, I must hold, that in the moment when Jesus Christ paid my debts, my debts were cancelled—in the hour when he worked out for me a perfect righteousness it was imputed to me, and therefore I may as a believer say I was complete in

Christ before I was born, accepted in Jesus, even as Levi was blessed in the loins of Abraham by Melchisedec; but I know likewise that justification is described in the Scriptures as passing upon me at the time I believe. "Being justified by faith," I am told "I have peace with God, through Jesus Christ." I think, therefore that adoption and justification, while they have a very great alliance with eternity, and were virtually done then, yet have both of them such a near relation to us in time, and such a bearing upon our own personal standing and character that they have also a part and parcel of themselves actually carried out and performed in time in the heart of every believer. I may be wrong in this exposition; it requires much more time to study this subject than I have been able yet to give to it, seeing that my years are not yet many; I shall no doubt by degrees come to the knowledge more fully of such high and mysterious points of gospel doctrine.

But nevertheless, while I find the majority of sound divines holding that the works of justification and adoption are due in our lives I see, on the other hand, in Scripture much to lead me to believe that both of them were done in eternity; and I think the fairest view of the case is, that while they were virtually done in eternity, yet both adoption and justification are actually passed upon us, in our proper persons, consciences, and experiences, in time,—so that both the Westminster confession and the idea of Dr. Gill can be proved to be Scriptural, and we may hold them both without any prejudice the one to the other.

From: C.H. Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol. 7, Page 180, 81

Joel R. Beeke

We must also firmly reject Antinomian or hyper-Calvinistic tendencies which adhere to a justification from eternity that negates the need for actual justification in time by becoming personal partakers of Christ by faith. For example, Abraham Kuyper went beyond the Synod of Dort in describing justification by faith as merely "becoming conscious" of the fact that we were already justified by God from eternity and in the resurrection of Christ. William Gadsby, J. C. Philpot and most of the Strict Baptists speak similarly by affirming that the believer is justified in time *only* with respect to his own conscience by the Spirit's witness. This erroneous view already existed in Puritan times among those with Antinomian tendencies, as Thomas Goodwin's apt response to it reveals: "It is vain to say I am justified only in respect to the court of mine own conscience. The faith that Paul and the other apostles were justified by, was their believing on Christ that they *might be* justified (Galatians 2:15, 16), and not a believing they were justified already." [*The Object and Acts of Justifying Faith* (repr. Marshallton, Delaware: National Foundation for Christian Education, n.d.), p. 325]

The view that an actual justification by faith in time does not exist for the believer faces three additional obstacles: First, it is contrary to Romans 4:6-8 which clearly affirms the imputation of Christ's righteousness in time. Second, time itself would then be a mere parenthesis, for God's people would not be viewed prior to regeneration as being "*children of wrath, even as others*" (Ephesians 2:3). If justification by faith does not transfer a sinner from the state of wrath to that of grace, and is merely a recognition of justification from eternity, all historical relevance of justification by faith alone is swept away. Third, if justification by faith is not a personal and historical necessity, the fruits of justification in deadness to sin and aliveness to Christ would likewise be a matter of indifference. One could then ask in all seriousness, "*Shall we not sin, that grace may abound?*" (Romans 6:2). This Paul strenuously opposes in Romans 6.

... Faith is over-emphasised when viewed as a condition of salvation (Arminianism), but under-emphasised when denied as a necessary fruit of salvation (Antinomianism).

Joel R. Beeke, article: *Justification by Faith Alone*. This article is chapter 5, taken from the book *Justification by Faith ALONE*, Soli Deo Gloria.

Wilhelmus à Brakel

Justification Is not from Eternity

Does justification occur only once, that is, either from eternity, at the death of Christ, or when one first comes to the conclusion that Christ is his Savior? ...

We maintain, first of all, that in the matter of justification God must be viewed as the Justifier and man as the one being justified. ... One can thus view the act of justification from God's perspective, that is, what He performs in this act, or from man's perspective, noting the manner whereby man receives this. When viewing this act from God's perspective it is referred to as *justification activa*, *active* justification. When viewed from man's perspective it is referred to as *justification passiva*, *passive* justification. These are one and the same act. The difference pertains only to the manner in which it is performed or how it is received. ...

Prior to creation and the existence of the elect, God has eternally purposed to justify the elect in their lifetime on the basis of the merits of Christ which are received by faith. "Who hath saved us...according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9); "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph. 1:5).

This purpose is not the equivalent of justification, for a purpose differs from its execution; we shall demonstrate shortly that this is so.

Thirdly, man having sinned, the Lord Jesus, because of the covenant of redemption, gave Himself as a Surety who took all upon Himself. As such He took their personal guilt from them upon Himself in order to atone for this at the appointed time. Since He made full satisfaction for this guilt, He has merited the right to eternal life for them. Having fully accomplished this, He was therefore "justified in the Spirit" (1 Tim. 3:16), that is, God declared that satisfaction had been made by Him and that He no longer had to suffer and be obedient for the satisfaction of His justice on behalf of the elect. Thus, their sins have been atoned for by reason of a transaction between the Father and the Surety, and the right to eternal life was merited. Christ having thus been justified, all His elect are justified in Him *virtualiter*, that is, *by its virtue* and efficacy, and are indeed reconciled. This, however, is not so *actualiter*, that is, actually, for they did not exist as yet. The first [justification *virtualiter*] is not the justification of which Scripture speaks, but rather the latter [justification *actualiter*]; this cannot occur unless man, having sinned, exists and believes in Christ.

Fourthly, when man does actually exist, is grievously troubled and perplexed about his sins, and by means of the gospel believes in Christ, thereby being united to Him and being a partaker of His righteousness, God then actually justifies him and pronounces the sentence of acquittal upon him from His Word, which is the voice of God. This is even so if the believer as yet is not aware of a peace in his conscience as a result of this declaration. This may be due to ignorance of the voice of God, to objections arising in his mind, or to doubts regarding the veracity of his faith. It may also be that upon hearing this pronouncement in the Word, he believes this by faith and finds peace. It may also be that

this is sealed by the special operation of the Spirit, causing him to taste and perceive immediately what it means to have the forgiveness of sins, to be reconciled with God, to be an heir of eternal life, and to enjoy the fruits of all these.

Fifthly, justification is an actual, absolute, complete acquittal of guilt and punishment, and a granting of the right to eternal life. It is neither contingent upon any condition which could change the sentence, nor does it pertain to *some* sins (thus having no effect upon others), but it pertains to *all* the sins of the person as he presently is. It is identical for all believers, irrespective of time, location, or person; the one is not justified in a different or more complete manner than the other. They are all justified on the basis of the satisfaction of Christ, which is received by faith. “Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith” (Rom. 3:30); “To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His Name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43). Since justification is identical in all, it is likewise also perfect, and thus there can be no mention of a greater or lesser degree, as is true in sanctification. God justifies the person, forgives all sins, and gives him full access to all the benefits of the covenant; there is nothing lacking in this. However, since faith—the means—is either stronger or weaker, the assurance of justification is likewise variable; this, however, is not so for the justifying act of God. This act is perfect and complete. This is true in reference to the spiritual state of believers; that is, in being declared heirs of eternal life and reconciled children of God, as well as in reference to the sins which they repeatedly commit. The latter are repeatedly removed. Forgiven sins can never again be brought back to provoke the wrath of God and incur punishment. God nevertheless chastises His own concerning all forgiven sins. David’s sins were forgiven, but the sword would not depart from his house because of these sins; Job inherited the iniquity of his youth.

Sixthly, after the pronouncement of peace, believers do again return to foolishness, and daily they yet stumble in many things. These sins by their very nature are time and again worthy of temporal and eternal punishments. The Lord Jesus, however, as High Priest and Advocate, stands before the throne of grace and continually exhibits the efficacy of satisfaction for sins which are repeatedly committed. They are thus delivered from wrath by His life (Rom. 3:9–10). Sins do not place them outside of the state of grace, as if their prior justification were thereby nullified; no, God is and remains reconciled with them in Christ. God views them as His children, favorites, and heirs. The justification which occurs upon the first act of faith, and which occurs time and again after that, each time includes the forgiveness of sins—sins to be committed subsequently *virtualiter*, that is, as far as virtue and efficacy are concerned; thus declaring that they would also each time be forgiven *actualiter*, that is, actually. However, sins cannot be forgiven in actuality prior to being committed. We cannot speak of that which does not exist; whatever has not been committed cannot be forgiven. The godly also understand it to be thus when they perceive themselves to be justified by faith. They believe that God, in Christ, has forgiven them all their sins, has received them as children and heirs, and are assured that in the future they will remain reconciled and continue to be heirs. Therefore, when they fall, God will each time and repeatedly forgive them. ...

Brakel then lists the doctrines of an Antinomian cult of his day, among these note the following extraction which repeats some of Fortner’s claims:

- They maintain that God views the elect in Christ and justifies them from eternity. At birth Adam’s sin is thus not imputed to them, and the corruption of their nature is no sin to them, since they already are justified.
- They maintain that not only all their past, present, and future sins are paid for, but also that God has perfectly justified them from that very moment (in eternity), and from the

very first cannot view them in any other way but in Christ. Thus, nothing is sin to them anymore, in spite of the fact that they do all that is called sin.

- They deem conversion to be nothing else but a believing that Christ has died for them. They consider sanctification to be the cleaving of Christ's righteousness to them as their own personal righteousness. They thus consider that they must be viewed as having personally fulfilled the law—as one upon whom the law no longer has a claim. It is therefore sufficient for them merely to believe that Christ has died for them, for then they are free from the entire law, and whatever they do is no sin for them.
- Thus the basis for all their abominable and carnal propositions is a misconception and abuse of the doctrine of justification. They therefore answer the question presented above by stating that justification does not occur frequently and daily, but that it has occurred once and for all. (sic)

... ***Justification did not occur from eternity.*** God has, indeed, decreed from eternity to justify the elect; however, this decree and purpose is not justification itself. This is evident for the following reasons:

First, this purpose is never referred to as the act of justification. It is one thing to purpose and to decree, and another thing to execute that purpose and decree.

Secondly, the elect, prior to their regeneration “were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (Eph. 2:3), and enemies of God (Rom. 5:10). This they could neither be, nor could this be said of them if they already had actually been justified.

Thirdly, justification occurs after being called. “...whom He called, them He also justified” (Rom. 8:30). It occurs by means of the act of faith. “Therefore being justified by faith...” (Rom. 5:1); “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:28). Since faith is exercised by a person who actually exists, it follows that justification did not transpire in eternity.

Fourthly, Scripture speaks of the forgiveness of sins in the future tense; God shall justify and God shall forgive. “Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith” (Rom. 3:30); “To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His Name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43); “...then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin” (2 Chr. 7:14). Justification did therefore not occur from eternity.

Fifthly, God justifies believers when they actually exist and confess their sins. “I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah” (Psa. 32:5); “This man went down to his house justified” (Luke 18:14); “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

From the foregoing it is therefore irrefutable that justification did not occur from eternity. Out of this most essential proof follows also the second proposition: ***Man is not actually justified at the death and resurrection of Christ***, even though their sins have completely been paid for and God's justice has been satisfied.

Brakel, Wilhelmus, Th.F., *The Christian's Reasonable Service, Volumes I and II*, (CD ROM version, Escondido, CA: Ephesians Four Group) 1999; Vol. 2, c34. Banner of Truth (1984), p158-161.

James Henry Thornwell

The Antinomian theory of eternal justification, which, as it makes acceptance with God compatible with a state of sin, is destructive of the interests of holiness.

There is no need for asserting what the scriptures everywhere deny - an eternal justification.

James Henry Thornwell, *Collected Writings, Banner of Truth* (1986), Vol. 2, p282, 283.

James Buchanan

The ANTINOMIAN doctrine of Justification, which sprung up among the Anabaptists in Germany, obtained a footing among some sectaries in our own country, and spread to some extent in New England ... The Antinomian doctrine of Justification was directly opposed to that of the Reformers, and could not, therefore, be its natural fruit, or its legitimate development. ... The advocates of that theory differed from the Reformers, *first*, in regard to the nature and effects of imputation. For they were in the habit of speaking as if the imputation of our sins to Christ had made Him personally a sinner, and even the greatest sinner that ever was; and as if the imputation of His righteousness to us made us personally righteous, – so perfectly, that God can see no sin in believers, or visit them with any token of His fatherly displeasure. *Secondly*, in regard to the nature and effects of our union to Christ. For they often spoke as if believers were in all respects one with Him, forgetting the wide difference between "a union of representation" and a "union of identity." *Thirdly*, in regard to the time and manner of a sinner's Justification, – confounding it sometimes with the eternal purpose of election, – sometimes connecting it with the death, or with the resurrection, of Christ, – as if there were no difference between a divine purpose in eternity, and its execution in time, or between the work of Christ in procuring, and that of the Holy Spirit in applying, the blessings of redemption. *Fourthly*, in regard to the use of the Law under the Gospel, – whether regarded as a covenant of works, or as a rule of life. *Fifthly*, in regard to the existence and ill-desert of sin in believers, and the duty of praying for the pardon of it, and cherishing a "broken and contrite spirit" on account of it. And, *lastly*, in regard to the nature and function of faith, which was represented, not as the means of obtaining pardon and acceptance with God, but rather as the evidence or declaration, merely, of our Justification, by which we obtain the assurance of it; as if it was equally true, but only not so manifest, before we believed.

James Buchanan, *Justification*, (On-line version; Copyright © 2003, Presbyterian's Armoury Publications), p. 111.

Brian Schwertley

Are Christians Justified from Eternity?

Some Protestant theologians teach that Christians are justified from eternity; that is, they believe that justification occurs in the mind of God prior to the existence of the universe. They regard the justification that occurs in time to be basically a recognition by the elect sinner that he was already justified by God in eternity past. In other words, justification in time only refers to what occurs in the conscience of the believing sinner. The objective declaration of God occurred not when the sinner believed, but before the foundation of the earth. Is such a view biblical?

The idea of eternal justification must be rejected for a number of reasons. First, the doctrine of justification from eternity confounds the decree of justification, which does

occur from eternity, with justification itself, which occurs in history. Turretin writes, “The decree of justification is one thing; justification itself another—as the will to save and sanctify is one thing; salvation and sanctification itself another. The will or decree to justify certain persons is indeed eternal and precedes faith itself, but actual justification takes place in time and follows faith.” In no place in the entire New Testament does one find Christ and the apostles telling people to believe that they were already justified. Their message was: “if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9).

Second, when the apostle Paul lists what theologians refer to as the order of salvation in Romans 8:29-30, he places justification within the sphere of human history. Justification occurs after calling and before glorification. No one would dispute that the external and internal calling of the sinner occur in time. Justification occurs after a person hears the gospel and is convinced by the Holy Spirit that it is true.

Third, the Bible says that faith or belief in Christ is necessary before a person is justified (Rom. 3:21-26, 28-30; Jn. 3:36). “[I]f justification takes place by faith, it certainly does not precede faith in a temporal sense.”⁵¹ Furthermore, when Paul discusses faith in Christ and imputation in Romans chapter 4, it is clear that the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the sinner occurs only when a person believes (Rom. 4:5, 9, 11, 22, 23, 24).

Fourth, if God’s people were not justified in time but from eternity, all the passages which speak of a real deliverance from sin, death, wrath and condemnation in time would be meaningless and contradictory. Paul says that believers before their salvation “were by nature children of wrath, just as the others” (Eph. 2:3). “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (Jn. 5:24). “We know we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren” (1 Jn. 3:14). “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:9-11). “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Col. 1:13). “For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sins which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit unto death. But now we have been delivered from the law having died to what we were held by” (Rom. 7:5-6). Although a Christian’s salvation was decreed in eternity and Christ’s perfect redemption occurred in the past, justification occurs in time only when a person actually believes and repents. “So that he is evidently a stranger to the Scriptures who does not know that God is often set forth as justifying believers in this life, as is evident from the examples of Abraham (Gen. 15:6), of David (Ps. 32:1, 2, 5; Rom. 4:6, 7), of the sinful woman (Lk. 7:48), of the publican (Lk. 18:14) and of all believers (Rom. 5:1).”

Brian Schwertley, *Justification by Faith - Part I: Justification by Faith Alone*; Copyright 2003. Glenwood Hills Bible Church. All Rights Reserved.
[\[http://www.glenwoodhillsbiblechurch.org/article.asp?ID=92\]](http://www.glenwoodhillsbiblechurch.org/article.asp?ID=92)

See also:

L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p517ff.

Francis Turretin, *Eclentic Theology*, Vol, 2, 16. 9th Question, P&R (1994), p682ff.

Appendix Three

The Arguments of John Gill for a complete eternal justification

Extracted from: *The Doctrine of Justification, by the Righteousness of Christ, Stated and Maintained, ACTS 13:39*; by John Gill, (London: George Keith, 1750) Gill's statements are faithfully summarised here and are often his actual words or even actual paragraphs.

Gill's position explained

Justification from eternity does not mean that:

- Men had an actual personal existence from eternity, though they had a representative one in Christ.
- That an actual payment of their debts occurred.
- That an actual satisfaction for their sins was then made by Christ, though he engaged to do it.
- That the imputation of *Adam's* sin to the condemnation of the elect did not occur.
- That Christ's bringing in an actual righteousness in time was unnecessary.
- That faith is useless in our justification, in our own consciences.

It does mean:

- More than merely God's prescience, or foreknowledge of it.
- More than a mere resolution and purpose to justify his elect in time.
- More than a decretive justification, as some divines call it; who apprehend that God's elect can, in no other sense, be said to be justified from eternity, than they may be said to be sanctified or glorified from eternity, because he had decreed to sanctify and glorify them.
- That: a) the justification of Christ at the resurrection, b) that which is pronounced by the Spirit of God in the conscience of believers, c) that which will be pronounced before men and angels at the general judgment, are no other than so many repetitions or renewed declarations.

In a word, I apprehend, that as God's eternal decree of election of persons to everlasting life, is the eternal election of them, so God's will, decree, or purpose, to justify his elect, is the eternal justification of them.

However, his eternal will to sanctify them is not an eternal sanctification of them; because sanctification is a work of God's grace upon us, and within us, and so requires our personal existence. Justification is an act of God's grace towards us, is wholly without us, entirely resides in the divine mind, and lies in his estimation, accounting and constituting us righteous, through the righteousness of his Son; and so required neither the actual existence of Christ's righteousness, nor of our persons, but only that both should certainly exist in time. (sic)

Proper (actual) justification is before faith.

1. Faith is not the cause, but the fruit and effect of justification. The reason why we are justified, is not because we have faith; but the reason why we have faith is because we are justified. The elect are justified in eternity and are thus given faith, the wicked are not and thus do not believe. Justification is twofold: a) an actual justification and release from sin in God's sight by the death of Christ before the conversion of the elect; b) the revelation of this justification is to the conscience.

Objection: is it true that justification causes faith? Faith results from God's sovereign grace imparted in regeneration while scripture links justification as flowing from faith in time. Paul says that, man is justified by faith (Rm 3:28), not that man believes because he is justified. If actual (temporal) justification occurs by faith, it cannot precede faith. (See item 3.)

2. Justification (or Christ's righteousness as our justification) is the object, and faith is the act, which is conversant with it. Now the object does not depend upon the act, but the act upon the object. Every object is prior to the act. Faith is the hand which receives the blessing of justification from the Lord, and righteousness, by which the soul is justified from the God of its salvation; but then this blessing must exist before faith can receive it.

Objection: this is just sophistry and proves nothing. God caused Christ to die and provide a righteousness for the elect. In his grace he grants us faith to believe that 'Christ died for me'. Timing is irrelevant here. Both righteousness and faith are in God's gift; both are made available in time.

3. The elect of God are justified whilst ungodly, and therefore, before they believe; the reason of the consequence is plain, because a believer is not an ungodly person. Not that God justifies the ungodly without a righteousness; but he imputes and reckons to them the righteousness of his Son.

Objection: Are they? If our actual justification follows faith, as scripture shows, regeneration changes the ungodly person in order to believe so that he is justified. God provides faith in the righteousness of Christ [and repentance] and this issues in our justification. These are initiated at our regeneration by the Spirit, so regeneration imparts faith that triggers justification. At what point is the ungodly made into a new creature? At regeneration, upon faith, at justification, at adoption? The impact of salvation is not delineated into consecutive time frames that can be analysed satisfactorily; we analyse spiritual events that happen concurrently. More than that we cannot say. [See later, esp. item 8.]

4. All the elect of God were justified in, and with Christ, their Head and Representative, when he rose from the dead, and therefore before they believe.

Comment: No one disputes that the resurrection of Christ secured justification for the corporate body of the elect; but this does not advance his argument. Indeed, Gill then quotes a number of divines who argue for a threefold application of justification: decreed in eternity, won at the cross and applied by faith. Although the body of Christ can be said to be justified in principle or virtually in Christ's resurrection, we cannot say that individual members were justified before they were born or believe.

5. There is an eternal election of persons to everlasting life, and that the objects of justification are God's elect: **Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? it is God that justifieth.** (Rm 8:33). Now, if God's elect, as such, can have nothing laid to their charge, but are, by

God, acquitted, discharged, and justified; and, if they bore this character of elect from eternity, or were chosen in Christ before the world began, then they must be acquitted, discharged, and justified by God from eternity, so as nothing could be laid to their charge. Besides, electing grace before the world began, put them in Christ as righteous. We may argue eternal justification from eternal election, since eternal justification is a branch of it.

Objection: election is not justification. Election is an immanent act of God while justification is a transient act. (See item 7.)

6. There was, from all eternity, a covenant of grace and peace made between the Father and the Son, on the account of these elect persons; when all the blessings of grace, and promises of life, provided and secured in that covenant, were put into the hands of Jesus Christ for his people; and though they had then no personal or actual existence, yet they had a representative Being in Christ, in whom they were then *blessed with all spiritual blessings*. (Eph 1:3) And, if with all spiritual blessings, then with this of justification; which was no inconsiderable part of that grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. (2 Tim 1:9)

Objection: Gill confuses what is ideal in the counsels of God with what is apprehended by faith in time. God granted all spiritual blessings to those in Christ by decree in eternity, viewed them as having these ideally from outside time and ensured (by the cross and the work of the Spirit) that they received the actual blessings in time. One of the blessings is the indwelling of the Spirit, yet Jesus tells us that OT saints did not experience this. Saints had to wait until Jesus had been glorified before they could know this empowering (Jn 7:39).

7. Christ was set up from everlasting, as the Mediator of this covenant on the behalf of his people. He then engaged to be a surety for them, and was accepted of by God the Father as such; who thence forward looked for his debt, and expected satisfaction of him, and let the sinners go free, for whom he engaged. Looking at him for the payment, he looked at them as discharged; and they were so in his eternal mind, and, in this respect, were justified from eternity. And indeed, it is a rule that will hold good, that as soon as any one becomes a surety for another, the other is immediately freed, if the surety be accepted.

Objections: This contradicts what Gill has earlier said. He has earlier denied that an actual payment of debts occurred in eternity or that an actual satisfaction for their sins was then made by Christ. Yet here he says that sinners were discharged from sin in eternity and justified. This also means that sinners stood in the righteousness of Christ before they were converted, when scripture states that they were lost in sin and under wrath. There is a world of difference between what was ideal in God's counsel and what became real in time.

Penal debt is not like a pecuniary debt. Even after payment of a ransom, removal of guilt may depend upon certain conditions and does not necessarily follow. The elect are not personally justified in the scriptural sense until they accept Christ by faith and thus appropriate his merits (sic, Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p520).

8. As soon as Christ became a surety, the sins of all those persons, for whom he became a surety, were reckoned and accounted to him; and, if accounted to him, then not to them; if they were laid to his charge, then not to theirs; and, if he was answerable for them, then they were discharged from them. If there was an imputation of them to him, then there must be a non-imputation of them to them; which the apostle plainly intimates, when he says, *God was in Christ, that is, from everlasting, reconciling the world unto himself, not*

imputing their trespasses unto them. (2 Cor 5:9) that ‘this act of God may be called the general justification of the elect’ (Witsius, *Animadv. Irenic.* c. 10. & 2.).

Objections: While it is true that the merits of Christ must be imputed to the elect before conversion, the sinner receives grace and regeneration on the basis of justification not yet realised in his life. Again the contrast is between what is ideal in God’s mind and what is yet to be realised on the basis of God’s counsel. Grace can be given to the elect as sinners on the basis of what is true in God’s mind, true in eternity but not yet realised in the sinner’s experience. Regeneration is granted on the basis of a sure and promised justification yet to be experienced by the sinner.

‘The inference ... that the objective reconciliation of the world in Christ involves the non-imputation of sin in the sinner ... is not correct. The evident meaning of the apostle is: God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, as appears from the fact that He does not impute to men their sins, and that He has entrusted to His servants the word of reconciliation. Notice that *me logizomenos* (present tense) refers to what is constantly going on. This cannot be conceived as a part of the objective reconciliation, for then the following clause *and having committed to us the word of reconciliation* would also have to be so interpreted, and this is quite impossible.’ (Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p520; see also item 7.)

9. That God from eternity willed to punish sin, not in the persons of the elect, but in the person of Christ their surety. That it is the will of God to punish sin, not in his people, but in his Son, is plain and manifest, from his *setting him up* (Rm 3:25) in his purpose, *to be a propitiation for their sins*; from his sending him forth in the likeness of sinful flesh. If it was God’s eternal will not to punish sin in his people, but in his Son, then they were eternally discharged, acquitted from sin, and secured from everlasting wrath and destruction; and, if they were eternally discharged from sin, and freed from punishment, they were eternally justified.

Objections: Again Gill confuses what is ideal in God’s counsel and accomplished in time by the cross of Christ. Sin was not propitiated until Jesus died for sins.

It is God’s eternal will to have a perfect, harmonious world where heaven and earth mingle together and all men are righteous. But this has not transpired yet, and is awaiting the Day of Judgment and a renovation of the earth by fire.

10. The saints under the Old Testament were justified by the same righteousness of Christ, as the saints under the New; and that before the oblation, or sacrifice, was actually offered up, or the everlasting righteousness was actually brought in; before an actual payment of debts was made, or an actual satisfaction for sins given. For Christ’s blood, when it was shed, was shed for *the remission of sins that were past*. (Rm 3:25, 26; Heb 9:15) And his death was *for the redemption of transgressions that were under the first Testament*. Now if God could, and did, actually justify some, having taken his Son’s word as their surety, upon a view of his future righteousness, three or four thousand years before this righteousness was actually wrought out; why could he not, and why may it not be thought that he did, justify all his elect from eternity, viewing the same future righteousness of Christ, which he had engaged to work out for them, and which he knew full well he would work out; since, though they had not then an actual, yet they had a representative Being in Christ their Head?

Objection: Paul explains that before the cross the sins of the OT saints were ‘covered’ and ‘passed over’ (Rm 3:25, 4:7) awaiting actual remission at Calvary. Although they were

considered righteous by imputation, they did not know the full benefits of justification, e.g. a new nature or the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Jn 7:39). The full benefits of justification are applied by the Spirit, but if he is not indwelling, then these benefits cannot be applied. The fulness of eternal life is only available after the cross and for this reason the OT saints longed to understand what this meant in our case: Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow (1 Pt 1:10-11).

For this reason, the benefits of the New Covenant are placed squarely in the future by OT prophets: Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah (Jer 31:31). The day had not yet come when the New Covenant blessings and the fulness of the Spirit were available to saints. The provisions of justification had not been made fully available but were held in trust awaiting the cross. Yet the OT saints were accounted by God as justified through faith in terms of their standing with God as legally righteousness (Rm 4:3).

Faithful saints like Zacharias, Elizabeth, Mary, Simeon and Anna had a the provisions of justification made available for them but still 'looked for redemption' and waited for 'the consolation of Israel' in the birth of the Messiah/Deliverer (Lk 1:5-24, 26-56, 67-80; 2:25-36, 37, 38). The blessings of the Gospel were still a covenant 'promise', yet to be fulfilled. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* (Heb 11:13). This is why Jesus needed to perform the work of atonement before the promises of eternal life could be made actually available to faithful saints: He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance (Heb 9:15).

10. Justification is an immanent act of God, and thus is from eternity. (Justification as an Eternal and Immanent Act of God, *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, Book II, Chapter V, section II.)

Objection: Is this true? Is not justification a transient act, as it passes from God to the sinner? So, justification is more like creation or the incarnation. God decreed the creation of the world in eternity, but the world was not in existence until he actually created it. God decreed that his Son would become a man and suffer for the sins of the elect; but this did not actually take place until Jesus was born.

When advocates of eternal justification feel caught by this they speak of justification as an intention of God. But this again confuses God's counsel; with the execution of it in time. If the intention of God to create equals an actual creation, then the world was created from eternity. This is absurd.

The federal position of the elect

When faced with the scriptural facts regarding our status before faith (ungodly, children of wrath, sinners, abiding in death etc.) he says:

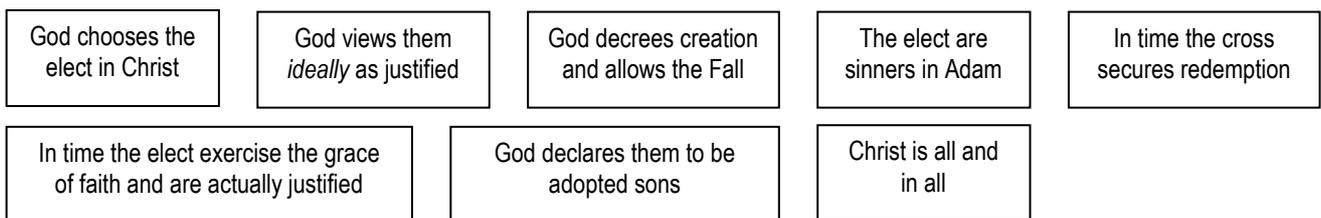
In order to solve this seeming difficulty, let it be observed, That God's elect may be considered under two different *Heads*, and as related to two different covenants at one and the same time. As they are the descendants of *Adam*, they are related to him, as a covenant-head, and as such, sinned in him; and, through his offence judgment came upon them all to condemnation; and so they are all, by nature, children of wrath, even as others. But then, as considered in Christ, they were loved with an everlasting love: God chose them

in him before the foundation of the world; and always viewed and accounted them righteous in Christ, in whom they were eternally secured from eternal wrath and damnation. So that it is no contradiction to say, that the elect of God, as they are in *Adam*, and according to the covenant of works, are under the sentence of condemnation; and that as they are in Christ, and according to the covenant of grace, and the secret transactions thereof, they are justified and freed from all condemnation. This is no more a contradiction, than that they are loved with an everlasting love, and yet are children of wrath at one and the same time, as they certainly are.

While this is true it does not assist his defence. He made the case earlier that the elect are actually, really justified in eternity before they are born. Here he is saying that these actually righteous, justified sons are placed by God deliberately into a state of condemnation and cursing through creation. How can this be possible? How can a just and holy God place an eternally holy and just son into the wrathful curse of being fallen in Adam?

The truth is that that God eternally decreed the justification of the elect and viewed them ideally as holy in Christ; justified in principle but not yet actual. Since they are not yet actually justified, they can be born in Adam without any contradiction in God. God's action towards the elect is one of redemption and rescue to take them out of Adam. In Gill's system, God's action is inconsistent and open to charges of being unloving - God places really holy, really justified, really righteous adopted sons into a realm of wrath, sin and cursing by creating them in Adam. How can someone who has been really justified and made holy by God subsequently be placed in sin and cursed?

This system also contradicts God's attributes. God does not change, when he looks at the reprobate he is angry, when he looks at the elect he is loving. He does not begin by loving the elect in eternity, then changing his love for hate (while the elect are in Adam) and then changing his hate back to love (when they believe in Christ). There is no evidence in scripture that God loves and hates the elect at the same time. The elect are always seen by God as being in Christ, not Adam, ideally. They were loved by God in eternity, as being in Christ, hence they are viewed ideally as righteous; God sees their end in Christ from the beginning. Their salvation is ideal in eternity and actual in time. This can be shown as:



Thomas Goodwin's apparent support of eternal justification, used by John Gill.

The first progress, or step, was at the first covenant-making and striking of the bargain from all eternity: we may say, of all spiritual blessings in Christ, what is said of Christ, that *his goings forth are from everlasting*. Justified then we were, when first elected, though not in our own persons, yet in our Head, as he had our persons then given him, and we came to have a being and interest in him: *You are in Christ*, (saith the apostle) and so we had the promise made of all spiritual blessings in him, and he took all the deeds of all in our name; so in Christ we were blessed with all spiritual blessings, Ephesians 1:3. As we are blessed with all other, and with this also, that we were justified then in Christ. To this purpose is that place, Romans 8:30, where he speaks of all those blessings which are applied to us after redemption, as calling, justification, glorification, as of things already past and done, even then when he did predestinate us: whom he hath predestinated, them he hath called, them he hath justified, them he hath glorified. He speaks it as in the time past; neither speaks he thus of these blessings, as past simply in regard of that presence, in which all things stand before him from eternity; all things past, present, and to come, being to him as present: nor doth he speak it only in regard of a resolution, or purpose, taken up to call and justify, he calling things that are not as though they were, Romans 4:17. For thus it may be said, of all his other works towards the creatures in common, that he hath created and preserved them from everlasting: but in a more special relation are these blessings decreed, said to have been bestowed, because, though they existed not in themselves, yet they existed really in a Head that represented them and us, who was by to answer for them, and to undertake for them, which other creatures could not do; and there was an actual donation and receiving of all these for us, (as truly as a feoffee in trust may take lands for one unborn) by virtue of a covenant made with Christ; whereby Christ had all our sins imputed to him, and so taken off from us, Christ having then covenanted to take all our sins upon him, when he took our persons to be his; and God having covenanted not to impute sin unto us, but to look at him for the payment of all, and at us as discharged. Of this seems that place, 2 Corinthians 5:19, evidently to speak, as importing that everlasting transaction; *God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself not imputing their trespasses to them*, that is, not imputing them then when he was reconciling us unto himself in Christ. So as then God told Christ, as it were, (for it was a real covenant) that he would look for his debt and satisfaction of him, and that he did let the sinners go free; and so they are, in this respect, justified from all eternity. And, indeed, if the promise of life was then given us, (as the apostle *Paul* speaks, Titus 1:2) then also justification of life, without which we could not come to life. Yet this is but the inchoation, though it be an estating us into the whole tenure of life." [Vol. 4. par. 1. p. 104, 105.]

But this needs to be balanced with Goodwin's clear statements against eternal justification; see earlier quotes. For example: *It is vain to say I am justified only in respect to the court of mine own conscience. The faith that Paul and the other apostles were justified by, was their believing on Christ that they might be justified (Galatians 2:15, 16), and not a believing they were justified already.* [Justifying Faith, p. 325]