

Justification is also used in our everyday speech when we say that one justifies one's actions, for instance.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines 'justifies' as follows:

**jus·ti·fies. --tr. 1. To demonstrate or prove to be just, right, or valid: *justified each budgetary expense as necessary; anger that is justified by the circumstances.* 2. To declare free of blame; absolve. 3. *Theology.* To free (a human being) of the guilt and penalty attached to grievous sin. Used only of God. 4. *Law.* a. To demonstrate sufficient legal reason for (an action taken). b. To prove to be qualified as a bondsman.**

All these aspects of the definition have one thing in common: There is action that is at variance with some or other code of conduct, such as a law or accepted behavior.

The variance between action and code of conduct may exist because of ambiguity or misunderstanding or outright transgression of the code of conduct. Acting between one's actions and the code of conduct is one's conscience.

In a legal matter actions are measured against the law without considering the conscience. That means that someone may be innocent of transgressions against the law, but may still be considered guilty in a moral sense. When the law is absent from the equation, guilt is defined by the individual's conscience, which is the sentry standing guard over the actions of the individual, judging every thought, action or inaction, reminding and indicting the individual of behavior that is at variance with the code of conduct.

The conscience fulfills a guiding role and not an executive role. It can only warn, indict and produce guilt in the individual, but action remains the prerogative of the individual.

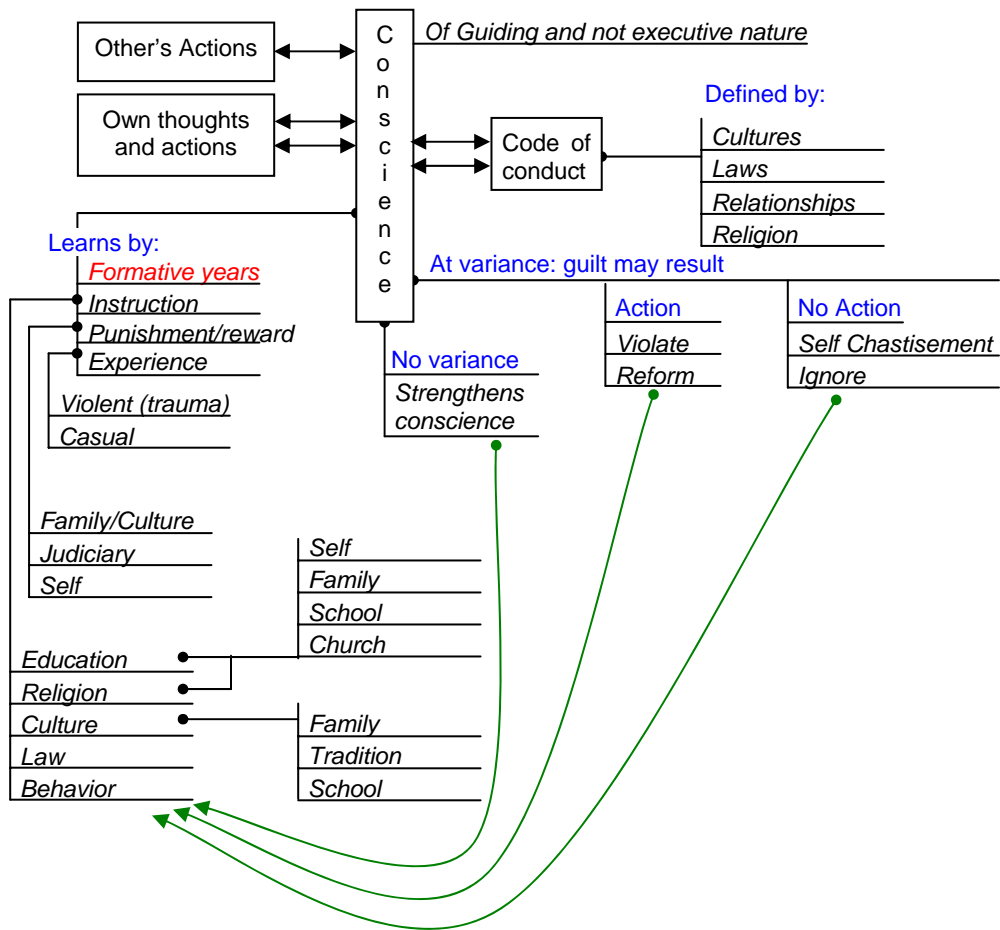
The conscience does not have inherent wisdom and its frame of reference by which it judges every one's thoughts and actions are established and honed by various factors. It is capable of relearning, rejecting previous frames of reference and adopting new ones as the individual either ignores and embraces new behavior, which includes violent, involuntary relearning, such as incarceration, traumatic experiences, rational reasoning, and so

on. The conscience may indict or guide the individual based on knowledge of the law and other acceptable or desirable behavior.

Justification, therefore, assumes the following:

- a) that one's actions are at variance with the code of conduct
- b) there is a need or desire to reconcile the action with the code of conduct
- c) action is taken to effect the reconciliation, which may even be illegal or unacceptable
- d) conformation to conscience, code of conduct, or neither may take place, which relearns or confirms the conscience's frame of reference, good or bad.

The graphic below illustrates a model which shows some of the surrounding influences and outcomes concerning justification.



When one, then, has reason to justify some action or inaction, it proves that there has been variance between the action or inaction, and the code of conduct. It is proof of the existence of one's conscience if one finds reason to justify something.

When one's conscience is unable to relearn or fail to act as sentry judging every thought or action, one may assume that such a person suffers from some mental disorder, a discussion which is beyond the scope of this study.

It is important that we understand the forces that act upon one's conscience, and the education thereof in terms of the Reformed understanding of the Christian faith.

An infant's parents' baptismal covenant ensures that a child receives early and proper instruction in the Christian faith from infancy. Infant education followed by example is the most powerful instruction that a conscience can receive.

Proper functioning of our consciences is a function of our knowledge of the Word of God, which equips our consciences to respond as a first defense in cases where our thoughts and actions and those of others are at variance with the Word of God. Without proper knowledge and understanding of the will of God, as much as He chose to reveal it to us, our conscience could not possibly be a sure guide and defense against false doctrines and sin.

The effectual presence of the Holy Spirit works in this manner to sanctify us and lead us to more holy lives for the sake of peace and His kingdom.

So, when we justify our actions, that is, we have to remove any ambiguity or misunderstanding, we should know that it should be done with a good conscience. A good conscience would prevent us from justifying actions which should be repented of, and prompt us to justify actions that are lawful and proper, but which may be misunderstood and cause offense.

5. HOW DOES THE SATISFACTION OF CHRIST BECOME OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS, SEEING THAT IT IS WITHOUT US?

It may at first seem unusual that we should be justified by anything that belongs to another. To explain this, we need to look more carefully how the satisfaction was made; how the obedience of Christ becomes ours. For, unless it is made ours or applied unto us, we cannot be justified by it. Just as a wall cannot become white unless the whiteness is physically applied to it.

We find two ways in which the satisfaction of Christ is applied to us, namely:

- a. God himself applies it unto us, that is, He makes the righteousness of Christ over unto us and accepts us as righteous on account of it as if it were ours.
- b. We apply it also unto ourselves when we receive the righteousness of Christ through faith, that is, we rest assured that God will grant it unto us, that He will regard us as righteous on account of it, and that He will free us from all guilt.

There is a double application, one in respect to God, and another in respect to us.

In respect to God.

The former is the imputation of Christ's righteousness, when God accepts Christ's righteousness as our own. God then accepts it so perfectly that it is as if we have never sinned, or have completely satisfied for our sins.

In respect to us.

The other side of the application, which has respect to us, is the act itself of believing, in which we are fully persuaded that it is imputed and given unto us. Both sides of this application must necessarily concur in our justification, for God applies the righteousness of Christ unto us upon the condition that we also apply the same unto ourselves by faith.

For if anyone were to offer another a benefit, and the recipient does not accept it, it does not become his. Without the latter acceptance of the application, the former is of no account.

Can the elect frustrate the working of God by not accepting the application of righteousness? No, the elect cannot.

The application of the righteousness of Christ is also from God, for He first imputes it unto us, and then works faith in us, by which we apply unto ourselves that which is imputed. From this it is clear that the application of righteousness from God precedes our acceptance by faith, and is the cause of it.

*John 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.*

From the foregoing, it is clear that:

- a. It is not unusual to be justified by the righteousness of another, for the righteousness which is applied unto us by faith is not simply another's but is made ours by application. In this process Christ is the Subject while we are the Objects.
- b. The term 'imputation' in its significance applies to God alone while in its application applies to both God and us.
- c. God applies the righteousness of Christ unto us in one way, while we apply it in another. God applies it by imputation while we apply it by faith by accepting it. God provides us with the faith to accomplish this.
- d. To justify, in the sense that the church uses the phrase, is not meant legally, but evangelically. Legal righteousness is to make one that is unjust, just, by infusing in him the qualities of righteousness. Evangelical righteousness is to regard one that is unrighteous, as righteous, and to absolve him from guilt, and not to punish him, all of which is done on account of the satisfaction of another imputed unto him.

It is in this sense that the Scriptures use the phrase, which may also be said of almost every language. In Hebrew it

signifies to acquit one that is guilty, or to declare him innocent.

Exo 23:7 "Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent or the righteous, for I will not acquit the guilty.

Pro 17:15 He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD.

In Greek, in some cases, it signifies sometimes to regard, or to declare one righteous, and again it means to inflict punishment, the cause of a trial. It is in this last sense that Christ says, "For by your words you will be justified" or acquitted. (Matt 12:37)

To acquit one that is guilty, or declare him innocent, is used in two ways in Scripture. It signifies not to condemn but to acquit on trial.

Rom 8:33, 34 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Luke 18:14 I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.

Or it signifies to recognize and declare one righteous.

Luke 7:35; Ps 51:4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.

Both mean the same thing.

The phrase 'to justify' is never used among the Latin authors in the sense of making holy, or of infusing a habit of righteousness. It is used in a different sense in Scripture, as the following passages clearly prove, which cannot be understood otherwise than of the acquittal and free acceptance of the sinner:

## Adult study of Jesus Christ

Rom 3:24 - 28 And are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

Rom 4:5 - 8 However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."

Rom 5:9 - 11 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Next week we will look at the last of the six questions:

6. WHY IS THE SATISFACTION OF CHRIST MADE OURS, OR WHY DOES GOD IMPUTE IT UNTO US FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS?