



# Understanding the Justification of Faith According to Apostle Paul and James

Melina Agustina Sipahutar

Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Tarutung

Correspondence: [melinasipahutar1990@gmail.com](mailto:melinasipahutar1990@gmail.com)

**Abstract.** *Understanding the concept of Justification by Faith is crucial for Christians, as it enables them to gauge their comprehension and application of this doctrine in their lives. Many Christians have yet to fully grasp this foundational aspect of their faith. This study aims to elucidate the true significance of Justification by Faith by comparing the perspectives of Paul and James, which at first glance, seem contradictory. This research employs a literature review approach, involving the identification, classification, and analysis of relevant literature on the topic of Justification by Faith according to Paul, James, and Calvin. The study involves a hermeneutical analysis of biblical texts, a comparison of theological perspectives, and a systematic organization of findings. Paul asserts that justification occurs through faith, independent of works, as an act of God's grace (Romans 3:28, 4:5). The law reveals human sinfulness and the need for divine justification through faith in Christ. James emphasizes that genuine faith is demonstrated through works (James 2:24). He argues that faith without works is dead and insists on the necessity of works as evidence of true faith. Calvin integrates both perspectives, emphasizing that justification by faith is inseparable from the process of regeneration by the Holy Spirit. He views faith as a gift from God that leads to good works, the fruit of genuine faith. Justification by Faith is an act of God that can only be achieved through His grace and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Romans 4:5; 5:6). Faith is rooted in the truth of God's revelation in Christ, culminating in belief in His crucifixion and resurrection. Both Paul and James agree that faith and works are essential in a genuine response to God, with good works being the inevitable result of true faith. This study underscores the interconnectedness of faith and works, aligning with Martin Luther's assertion that good works are the fruit of righteousness. The comprehensive understanding of Justification by Faith involves recognizing it as a divine act that provides hope for salvation through faith, a gift from God facilitated by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:8; Galatians 5:22).*

**Keywords:** *justification of faith, paul, james*

## INTRODUCTION

Understanding the meaning of Justification by Faith is crucial, as it allows us to assess the extent of our comprehension and application of this concept in our lives. Many Christians have not yet grasped this fundamental aspect of their faith concerning justification by faith. This has prompted the author to explore the true significance of this doctrine. Specifically, this study focuses on comparing and contrasting the perspectives of Paul and James, where, at first glance, differing interpretations appear to exist .

The term "aletheia" (Latin: "veritas"), meaning "truth" in the sense of "not lying" or "not deceiving" (e.g., John 14:6; 17:17; 18:37). Secondly, the term "dikaiosyne" (Latin: "iustitia"), meaning "righteousness" in the sense of "not guilty," "justice," or "uprightness" (e.g., Romans 3:22; 4:3-9; 1 Corinthians 1:30, also Matthew 3:15, where the older translation as "religious requirement" must be rejected). In this discussion, the terms used are "righteous," "justification," and the verb "to justify" (justified), and the intended meaning is always the second one, which is related to the Greek term "dikaiosyne." In Latin, it is "iustitia"; compare with the English word "justice" (Oliver, 2014)

Justification is the work of God's grace that reckons the sinner as righteous before God due to their union with Christ, who obeyed God and died for sin. It can also be defined as God's act, a free act not based on human merit. Through justification, God attributes to the sinner the righteousness of Christ by faith and declares the sinner just and righteous before Him. Justification is associated with God's justice and righteousness. It is crucial to recognize that justification concerns the sinner's status as righteous, not their own righteousness or justice (Tarigan, 2022). This understanding is foundational to the peace, assurance, and joy of Christians. Even though they are sinners, they are accepted by God, not based on their efforts to obey God, but because He has imputed Christ's perfect righteousness to them. Thus, it can be concluded that justification is an act of God beyond human capability (Romans 4:5) and can only be accomplished by God (Romans 1:16-17) through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross (Romans 5:6) (Daniël Louw, 2015).

In Hebrews 11:1, the Word of God says, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." This means that faith underlies all genuine Christian experiences. Without faith, "it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). Faith means "trust in the truth of Jesus Christ, who was crucified and has risen." Faith encompasses both a decisive action and a continuous attitude. It involves an active personal responsibility towards God in Christ, not merely an awareness of God's reality (Wahyuni, 2021).

In Greek, faith is "pistis." According to its background in the Septuagint, it is rooted in the Hebrew concept of "amen," which means firm, steadfast, faithful. In its Greek context, "pistis" also contains the element of faithfulness. Therefore, from the fundamental understanding of faith, the term "to have faith" can be interpreted as faithfully affirming God's truth, confessing while holding firmly (Van Niekerk & Breed, 2018).

Faith arises not from the power of human eloquence but from the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:4). Faith is believing in the truth. If we acknowledge the truth of the realities of faith, the Holy Spirit enables us to apply it to ourselves. Faith rests on reality, is objective, and corresponds to the truth of God's revelation in Christ and the Gospel. At its pinnacle, faith must believe in the truth that Jesus Christ was crucified and risen. The foundation of faith is Christ, "who was delivered for our offenses and raised for our justification" (Romans 4:25; cf. John 1:12; Acts 16:30-31; Romans 10:9). Faith in Christ means commitment to Him who died and rose for us, signifying union with Christ (Caneday, 2013).

## **METHODS**

This study employs a literature review approach with the following steps:

### **1. Identification of Relevant Literature**

Identify and gather relevant literature sources on the topic of "Justification by Faith" according to the views of Paul, James, and Calvin. These sources include biblical books (particularly the letters to the Romans and James), theological works by authors such as Hermann Luedemann, and writings by Calvin.

### **2. Classification and Analysis of Literature**

- a. Classify the literature based on the theological perspectives of each figure (Paul, James, Calvin) and identify the main themes that emerge in the discussion of justification by faith.
- b. Analyze biblical texts hermeneutically to understand the historical and theological contexts of each letter and statement.

### **3. Comparison of Perspectives**

- a. Compare the views of Paul and James on the relationship between faith and works. Focus on their key statements: "A person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law" (Romans 3:28) by Paul and "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone" (James 2:24) by James.
- b. Explore how Calvin integrates these perspectives into his Reformation theology and highlight the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of justification according to Calvin.

### **4. Systematization of Findings**

- a. Organize findings from textual analysis and perspective comparisons into a systematic framework. This includes how each figure understands the concept of justification by faith and how the differences and similarities among them can be explained.
- b. Structure the findings into sections that reflect the overall understanding of justification by faith within the Christian tradition.

### **5. Drawing Conclusions**

- a. Conclude the research by summarizing the main findings regarding the concept of justification by faith according to Paul, James, and Calvin.
- b. Provide theological interpretations and implications of these findings, and recommend areas for further research if necessary.

### **6. Preparation of the Final Report**

- a. Prepare the research report, including the introduction, literature review, methodology, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations.
- b. Ensure that the report is written clearly, logically, and systematically so that it can be easily understood by readers.

With these steps, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the concept of justification by faith according to various theological perspectives within the Christian tradition.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Justification by Faith According to Apostle Paul**

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, states, "For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law" (Romans 3:28). Apostle Paul asserts in this letter that justification occurs through faith, not by works. Paul speaks from personal experience, where he was accepted by God as a sinner (cf. Acts 22:1-16, Philippians 3:5-11). According to Paul, justification is an astounding act of God's grace that cannot be further explained and can only be accepted by faith. Therefore, Paul cannot say: justified by faith and works. Those who seek to be justified by their works are opposing faith because faith always comes to God with empty hands (Geerhardus, 2019).

If this is the case, what is the purpose of the law? In Romans chapter 7, Paul answers, "The law is good," and its demands are just. However, humans cannot do what is good, and for this reason, by looking at the law, humans must become aware of their shortcomings and sins (Romans 7:14-24). The law is useful because it points to human sin, a task that only Jesus Christ could accomplish (Plummer, 2013).

The imagery of the law, i.e., justification (Romans 3:24, 26; Galatians 2:15-16), portrays sin as a transgression of the law, and the sinner (human) stands as the accused before the Judge (God), who has full authority. All humans are sinners before God (Romans 3:23) and need liberation. Remarkably, God justifies the wicked (Romans 4:5), meaning the sinner is freed from punishment. The sinner is justified by God and receives God's justification. Paul's view clearly contradicts the common Jewish belief of his time, and Paul was aware of this (Hartog, 2014).

This is articulated by Hermann Luedemann in "The Anthropology of the Apostle Paul" (1872), who compares Paul's earlier statement (Romans 1:5) that salvation is a legal decision that frees, with his later understanding after conversion (Romans 5-8), where he declares that salvation is the transition from the old self to a new self through faith and God's justification by faith. Paul believes that God accepts humans as they are, with all their shortcomings, and then initiates a new life for them. With such justification, humans can live and experience their new life without the moral burden of sin (Shotsberger, 2018).

Paul's doctrine of justification by faith aims primarily to clarify that faith is separate from works (the notion that good deeds earn merit) and to show that it is solely an act of God's grace towards sinful humans.

### **Understanding Justification by Faith According to the Epistle of James**

You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone (James 2:24). According to James, faith means intellectual acceptance of monotheism (2:14). This faith is

also possessed by demons, who also "believe" (James 2:19). The devil is neither an atheist nor an agnostic; he is fully aware of the reality of God and His redemption in Christ. However, he lacks commitment to God and does not possess true faith. For James, works mean "keeping the royal law found in Scripture: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (James 2:8). James 2:24 contrasts nominal faith with spontaneous actions that honor God. For James, righteousness signifies a person's moral character. He asserts that it is useless for someone to have faith without accompanying works; such faith cannot save or be accepted by God. James illustrates this with everyday interactions, such as offering a blessing without providing food, which he deems futile and empty if not accompanied by real actions. This forms the basis for James's understanding and conclusion about true justification, where genuine faith is demonstrated by works. James equates faith without works to that of demons. He views faith and works as inseparable; both must exist and are accounted for by God (Cameron & Swezey, 2015).

### **The Similarity in the Meaning of Justification by Faith According to Paul and James**

Amidst the polemic regarding the meaning of justification by faith, it becomes evident that Paul and James share the same goal. James states: "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:24); while Paul declares: "A person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law" (Romans 3:28). Paul and James agree on the necessity of works. However, they differ in addressing the absence of works. James suggests that faith must be perfected by works to be justified, whereas Paul maintains that if works play a role in salvation, then faith itself is undermined. Nonetheless, they both acknowledge that without works, faith is deficient. Perfect faith must produce fruits of righteousness (Swezey & Finn, 2013).

Romans 3:28 contrasts living faith with self-justifying works, while James 2:24 contrasts nominal faith with spontaneous actions that honor God. For James, righteousness signifies a person's moral character, while for Paul, it usually refers to a righteousness that is given and accounted for. When Paul contemplates future judgment, he includes behavior (Romans 2:6; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Like James, he emphasizes "faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6) and is appalled by moral neglect among the justified (Romans 6:1-2).

Paul struggles against the Jewish belief that good deeds deserve rewards as the basis for salvation, countering this view by asserting that salvation by grace is achieved only through faith. James addresses a different issue, namely, dead orthodoxy, which "believes" but does not see moral consequences in it. He aims to awaken his readers by warning that faith that does not transform daily life is false and dead. Thus, for James and Paul, faith and works are both essential in a genuine response to God. Good works have their place, not as the basis for justification but as its inevitable result.

### **Justification by Faith According to Calvin**

If we ask how all that God has bestowed in Christ becomes ours, Calvin points to the work of the Holy Spirit. Because the Spirit of God works within us, we first receive faith. For faith is not the result of our own efforts but a gift from God by which we receive Christ. It is only through the Spirit that there is communion between Christ and us, renewing and regenerating our lives.

According to Calvin, justification by faith is the reverse side of regeneration; the two are inseparable. Learning to deny oneself, becoming increasingly sanctified, taking up the cross, and following Christ are all part of this process: "This is the acceptance by which God forgives us and considers us righteous. And we say that justification consists of the forgiveness of sins and participation in the righteousness of Christ."

Even though we remain sinners throughout our lives, because Christ has fulfilled what we should have borne, God not only justifies us but also accepts our deeds and declares them righteous. Thus, Calvin teaches two kinds of justification: the justification of humans and the justification of their deeds. This is not to say that our deeds are inherently righteous and valuable to God; they depend entirely on God's grace and arise from true faith, like fruit from a tree. A widespread misunderstanding is that the Reformers supposedly did not value good works, but the opposite is true. For them, the issue was how it is possible to do good. Justification is not the goal but rather the source from which good works flow (Vorster, 2015).

### **Dogmatics of Justification by Faith**

Regarding terms like "righteous," "righteousness," etc., as found in Indonesian Bible translations, there is difficulty in interpretation. In the New Testament Greek, there are two distinct words, the first word is *aletheia* (Latin: *veritas*), meaning "truth" in the sense of "not lying," "not deceitful" (e.g., John 14:6; 17:17; 18:37). The second word is *dikaiosyne* (Latin: *iustitia*), meaning righteousness in the sense of "not guilty," "justice," "uprightness" (e.g., Romans 3:22; 4:3-9; 1 Corinthians 1:30; also Matthew 3:15, where the old translation with "religious condition" must be rejected). In this discussion, the terms "righteous," "justification," and the verb "to justify" (justified) always mean the latter, which relates to the Greek word *dikaiosyne*. Its Latin equivalent is *iustitia*; compare with the English word "justice."

Relating to the issue of "justification," we can think of the judicial and courtroom realm. We are sinners summoned before God, the Judge, but this Judge declares us not guilty, as righteous people. Believing in Christ means "putting on" Christ (Romans 13:14; Galatians 3:27). This means we are united with Christ in such a way that we share in the righteousness and justice He manifested in His death and resurrection. "He who knew no sin (He who is righteous before God) became sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21). This is the wonder that God performs when He, in His grace, forgives our sins: Christ's righteousness and justice are made real and effective for us! According to God's judgment, according to how God judges us, we are now truly righteous, that is, in Christ, because of the faith that unites us with Christ (Roso, 2013).

Using another analogy: as we stand before God's judgment seat as sinners (meaning: right now, not just later on the "day of judgment"), Christ comes and stands in front of us, between us and the judgment seat, and God passes judgment while looking at Christ. By justifying Christ, we ourselves (who can take refuge behind Him) are also justified. In other words, it is another person, Jesus Christ (Latin: *iustitia aliena* = the righteousness or justice that belongs to another). We are indeed sinners and remain sinners, but at the same time, at

that very moment, we are righteous. We are justified by faith in Christ, for God gives and reckons to us the righteousness and holiness of Christ.

This truly applies in faith. We are justified by faith in Christ, meaning by faith in the grace that God shows us in the coming and work of Christ. The doctrine of "justification by faith" emphasizes to us that salvation rests with God and comes solely from God. Everything is already accomplished! Salvation does not depend on our own efforts and does not depend on the mediation of the Church and its priests, but has been provided at Golgotha, without us, but for us. Salvation is found only in Christ (Daniel Louw, 2016).

We are called to believe. The Gospel is presented to us in the form of a command: Believe! But as believers, we confess that even this faith is granted to us as a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8). Faith is produced by the Holy Spirit. God Himself enables us to accept what He says to us. Thus, our entire salvation occurs solely by God's grace, solely and only by that grace! This is the essence of the Gospel of "Justification by Faith."

## **CONCLUSION**

Justification is an act of God beyond human ability to achieve (Romans 4:5) and can only be accomplished by God (Romans 1:16-17) through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross (Romans 5:6). Faith relies on the reality, objectivity, and appropriate response to the truth of God's declaration in Christ and the Gospel, culminating in the belief in the truth that Jesus Christ was crucified and resurrected. The foundation of faith is Christ, "who was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:25; cf. John 1:12; Acts 16:30-31; Romans 10:9). For James and Paul, both faith and works are absolutely necessary in a genuine response to God. Good works have their place, not as the basis of justification but as its inevitable result. Perfect faith will undoubtedly produce fruits of righteousness.

For the author, the meaning of justification by faith signifies that we, as sinners, receive the hope of salvation from God, who planned this salvation through justification declared in Jesus Christ, which we obtain through faith or *pistis* provided for us. The faith we have does not originate from our own efforts but through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8). The faith within us, produced by the Holy Spirit, yields the fruits of faith, namely good works (Galatians 5:22). Thus, there is a close and interconnected relationship between faith and works. As Martin Luther expressed, "Good works are not the way to righteousness, but they are the fruit of righteousness; an outward result; for righteousness in man is like fruit on a tree." This is the fundamental understanding for the author of the meaning of justification by faith.

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