

Christ, as exhibited by divine authority in the Scriptures, and as attested to be acceptable and sufficient by his resurrection from the dead and by his mediatorial exaltation at the right hand of God. The acts or exercises of this faith seem to be three; or rather that far which is required in order to our justification is a complex act of the mind, which includes three distinct but concurrent exertions of the powers. It includes (1.) the assent of the understanding to the truth of the testimony of God in the Gospel; and especially to that part of which concerns the design and efficacy of the death of Jesus as a sacrifice for sin. (2.) The consent of the will and affections to this plan of salvation; such an approbation and choice of it as imply a renunciation of every other refuge, and a steady and decided preference of this. Unbelief is called a disallowing of the foundation laid in Zion; whereas faith includes a hearty allowance of it, and a thankful acquiescence in God's revealed method of forgiveness. (3.) From this assent of the enlightened understanding, and consent of the rectified will, to the evangelical testimony concerning Christ crucified, results the third thing, which is supposed to be implied in justifying faith; namely, actual trust in the Saviour, and personal apprehension of his merits. When, under the promised leading and influence of the Holy Ghost, the penitent sinner then confidently relies and individually lays hold on Christ, then the work of justifying faith is complete; then, and not till then, he is immediately justified. On the whole, it may be said that the faith to which the privilege of justification is annexed, is such a belief of the Gospel, by the power of the Spirit of God, as leads us to come to Christ, to receive Christ, to trust in Christ, and to trust the keeping of our souls in his hands, in humble confidence of his ability and his willingness to save us.

The grand doctrine of the Reformation was that of justification by faith, and was therefore held by all the Lutheran and Reformed churches. The papists assert that man's inherent righteousness is the meritorious cause of his justification; many protestant divines have endeavoured to unite the two, and have held that men are justified by faith and good works; and others have equally departed from the opinions of the earliest reformers on the subject of justification, in representing it as resulting from the imputation of Christ's—active and passive righteousness—to those that believe, instead of confining the imputation to the moral consequence and effect of both. In other words, that which is reckoned us in our justification for righteousness is our faith in Christ's merits, and that, not because of any intrinsic value in faith, but only for the sake of those merits. In a mere moral sense man's sin or righteousness is imputed to him, when he is considered as actually the doer of sinful or righteous acts. A man's sin or righteousness is imputed to him in its legal consequence, under a government of rewards and punishments; then to impute sin or righteousness signifies, in a legal sense, to reckon and to account it, to acquit or condemn, and forthwith to punish, or