

## Justification: Catholic and Protestant

What must I do to be saved? (i.e. What must I, a sinner, do to be made right with a holy God?).

This is the same question that both Catholics and Protestants ask.

We both believe in the same starting point, Original Sin. We both believe our nature is fallen and corrupt. We are in need of saving.

This difference between the response given by Catholicism and [classic] Protestantism (apart from differing views of authority) can be fundamentally seen in how we view the doctrine of [justification](#). The categories below aim to help each position be understood and access which is most biblical.

The difference is threefold: infusion vs. imputation; a process vs. a moment; and faith + works vs. by faith alone.

\*The examples are cited from the Roman Catholic Catechism on the one hand, which while contemporary reflects historic Catholic doctrine. On the other hand are several Protestant confessions that agree on justification and while historic continue to reflect contemporary classic Protestant belief.

### *Infusion vs. Imputation*

The first major difference is that Catholics see justification as an infusion of the believer with righteousness. Protestants see justification as an imputing of the believer with righteousness. Infusion is when something foreign is place within an object; it becomes that thing. Christ's righteousness is infused into us so that we actually become righteous. Imputation, or a crediting, means righteousness is given to our account. We are legally righteous before God but not actually righteous (that is the process of sanctification).

Roman Catholic Catechism	Westminster (Presbyterian), 1646/1689 Baptist
“Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the [entire] sanctification and renewal of the interior man.” 1889 “makes us inwardly just” 1992 “justification entails the sanctification of his whole being” (e.g. “inner man”) 1995	“Those whom God effectually calls, he also freely justifies, <sup>1</sup> not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous...” 1689.11a

It isn't just what happens but when.

### *Process vs. Momentary*

Part of the confusion is this: Catholics see justification as a process whereas Protestants see it as a moment. Hence, this is why Catholics include works as part of justification. Protestants by contrast see works as a consequence of our justification.

Roman Catholic Catechism	Belgiac Confession, 1561 (Reformed)
“Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man.” 1989	“...relying and resting upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours when we believe in Him...” 23

Catholics merge justification and sanctification together. Protestants see justification as the fountainhead of the order of salvation.

### *Faith + Works vs. Faith Alone*

Roman Catholic Catechism	39 Articles, 1571 (Anglican)/Augsburg Confession, 1531 (Lutheran)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “Justification is through faith and the sacrament of baptism [a work].” 1987</li><li>• “Justification is conferred through baptism.” 1992</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings: Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort...” (39 Articles XI)</li><li>• “Our churches teach that people cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits or works. People are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith...” (Augsburg IV).</li></ul> <p>The proper place of <a href="#">works</a> is here.</p>

Catholics stress justification is by faith and works. Protestants insist it is by faith alone (followed by good works). There are many similarities on these points that are shared in common, but what each means by them is very different.

Commonalities aside these two schemes of salvation are clearly very different.

<a href="#">Council of Trent</a> (6 <sup>th</sup> Session, 1547)	Galatians 1:9b (Luther’s great love)
“If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that	“If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let

nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of ...let him be anathema [cursed]”	him be accursed [anathema].”
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Which is form of justification is most biblical? A Catholic view of justification or a Protestant? How we come to be saved is at stake and so the question couldn't be more important.