

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

INTRODUCTION

- A.** We have had a number of occasions to refer to this teaching.
- 1.** It is at the heart of soteriology (doctrine of salvation).
 - 2.** It is what God's elect are chosen to. Rom. 8:30.
 - 3.** It is what (when thought through) proves the eternal security of the believer.
 - 4.** It is the teaching that broke open the Great Reformation of the sixteenth century.
 - a.** It is what largely separates Protestants from Roman Catholics.
 - b.** It is an assumed teaching of all Protestants, no matter what denomination.
- B.** This teaching is largely associated with the Protestant Reformer Martin Luther (1483-1547).
- 1.** Luther did not discover this teaching; he re-discovered it.
 - a.** It was for him a discovery.
 - b.** But he got it all from the apostle Paul.
 - 2.** It is hard for us to believe that this teaching largely lay behind a cloud for 1500 years.
 - a.** It is absolutely clear in the writings of St. Paul.
 - b.** It is not inconsistent with most of the Church Fathers.
 - (1)** Eastern Fathers, e.g. Chrysostom and Athanasius.
 - (2)** Western Fathers, e.g. Ambrose and St. Augustine.
 - c.** But the issue did not appear to come up.
 - (1)** Adolf Harnach (?) wryly observed that Marcion (a heretic, d.?) was the first to understand Paul but that he also 'misunderstood him'.
 - (2)** Perhaps people so feared Marcion that they stayed away from any teaching that faintly resembled his. Marcion was a Gnostic but said something that paralleled Luther's re-discovery.
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I HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- A.** Soteriology did not emerge in early church history as the issue that needed attention (at least as it appeared at the time). The issues largely were:
- 1.** Defending the faith over against Caesar.
 - a.** One confessed Christ under fear of death.
 - b.** Hence baptism sent a signal that one was prepared to die for Jesus Christ.
 - 2.** Confessing Jesus Christ as Lord was the issue.
 - a.** Caesar was not Lord; Jesus was.
 - b.** The theological content of Christ's lordship was not as clear to some as it may be to us now.
 - 3.** Fighting against Gnosticism: Chrysostom.
 - a.** Some Gnostics were prepared to affirm Christ's deity but not his humanity.
 - (1)** They were called Docetists.
 - (2)** Gr. *dokeo*: to appear; Christ only appeared to have a body but it was not really fleshly.
 - b.** The Apostles' Creed was drawn up to fight Gnosticism.
 - (1)** It emphasised the human side of Jesus.
 - (2)** Soteriology (e.g. 'forgiveness of sins') was not the issue; it was mainly Christology.
 - 4.** Emerging moralistic Christianity.
 - a.** It has been cogently argued by T F Torrance that there was scarcely a theology of grace at all in the early church.
 - b.** The need to be above reproach was seen as the main issue among believers.
 - 5.** Ecclesiology was somewhat dominant.
 - a.** The role of the bishop.
 - b.** The ascendancy of the bishop of Rome.

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- c. The place of the Lord's Supper.
- 6. Note: not until the time of St. Augustine (c.400) was there much discussion regarding soteriology.
 - a. Even then the issue was grace rather than what is given to us by faith alone.
 - b. Nothing in Augustine was inconsistent with what Luther would teach; it only has to be said that Augustine did not perceive the issue clearly.
- B. Prevailing teaching of Rome prior to Luther.
 - 1. The Bible should be hidden from ordinary people.
 - 2. The doctrine of purgatory.
 - 3. The doctrine of penance.
 - 4. Faith is assent to the teaching of the church.
 - 5. Faith plus works is the way of salvation.
- C. Martin Luther.
 - 1. Brief summary of his life.
 - a. b.1483, Erfurt, Germany; son of a coal miner.
 - b. Thunderstorm experience: 'Help me, St. Anne and I will become a monk.'
 - c. Entered monastery; completed his doctorate.
 - d. Lectured in theology 1512-1516.
 - e. Ninety-five Theses 1517.
 - f. Excommunicated from Rome 1520.
 - g. Married.
 - h. Died 1547.
 - 2. Theological breakthrough.
 - a. Justice of God in Romans 1:17 means God's "passive" justice.
 - (1) Active justice would be what one does in order to get satisfaction.

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- (3) Efficient cause (the effectual work of the Holy Spirit in producing faith).
- c. Assurance that we have been justified.
- d. Greater clarification regarding the imputation of Christ's righteousness when we believe.

II OUTLINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH Romans 1:17 - 4:12

- A.** The righteousness of God revealed.
 - 1.** Gr. *dikesune* has two meanings which are often used interchangeably.
 - a.** `Righteousness', meaning the righteousness of the Law.
 - (1) It includes the moral righteousness that God requires.
 - (2) It means the righteousness Christ provides.
 - b.** `Justice'; what God demands owing to his essential nature.
 - (1) It refers to what lies behind his wrath.
 - (2) It means that which must be satisfied before his wrath can be appeased (that is, to make him happy).
 - 2.** The gospel (good news) means the unveiling of God's righteousness/justice.
 - a.** When we preach the gospel we are at once declaring two things simultaneously:
 - (1) God is angry with sin.
 - (2) God's anger has been appeased by Jesus Christ.
 - b.** This is why Paul proceeds to talk about God's anger toward sin. Romans 1:18.
 - (1) The NIV sadly left out the Greek word *gar* (`for').
 - (2) When the gospel is preached it should show why good news is good news: that God is angry with sin but there is hope.
 - c.** The full gospel must ultimately include the fact of God's wrath.
 - (1) Some today refer to a `full gospel' as including what the Holy Spirit will do with believers (I know what they mean by that).

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(2) But in actual fact the Full Gospel means the simultaneous revelation of mercy *and* wrath!

B. From `faith to faith'.

1. Here is the most overlooked teaching today when it comes to the doctrine of justification by faith.

a. It is implicit in Calvin's clarification of Luther.

b. It is combining two of the `causes':

(1) Meritorious cause - what Christ did for us.

(2) Instrumental cause - what we must do in order to have the benefit of Christ's merit.

2. It is in these three words `faith to faith'.

a. *Gr. pistis.*

(1) The AV makes it absolutely clear.

(2) The NIV sadly shows it only as a footnote.

b. But it is the heart of Paul's teaching and the first statement he makes when introducing this teaching in Romans 1:17.

(1) It must not be glossed over.

(2) Otherwise Romans 3:22 will make little sense.

3. `Faith to faith' means two faiths.

a. One faith comes first: meritorious cause.

(1) It is what Jesus has done for us.

(2) It literally refers to his own very faith as a man when he was on this earth.

b. The second faith follows: instrumental cause.

(1) It is what we must have to be saved.

(2) If Jesus is the only one who believes then we will perish; we too must believe.

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- c. It is not until Romans 3:22 that this is clear.
 - (1) But only in the literal translation of the Greek.
 - (2) The AV got it right: 'Even the righteousness of God which is by the faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe'.

- d. Romans 3:22 shows:
 - (1) What Paul meant by righteousness of God in Romans 1:17.
 - (2) What Paul meant by 'faith to faith' in Romans 1:17.

- e. Romans 3:22 thus demonstrates three things:
 - (1) The first faith is the faith of Jesus Christ.
 - (2) What Christ did is for 'all': 'unto all and upon all'.
 - (3) The benefit of what Christ did is null and void except 'them that believe'. See Romans 3:25.

- f. In a word: Christ's faith must be followed by our faith or there will be no *justification*.

- g. What is Christ's faith?
 - (1) His perfect faith as a man.
 - (2) His perfect faith as our substitute.
 - (3) His perfect obedience to the Father (keeping the Law).
 - (4) His death on the cross. Romans 3:25-26.

- h. Paul could say, 'I live by the faith of the Son of God'. Gal. 2:20.
 - (1) This was the basis of Paul's own justification.
 - (2) He lived and breathed this faith.
 - (3) Note: it can even be extended to include Christ's perfect faith when interceding for us at God's right hand!

III IMPUTATION OF CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

A. What happens when our faith follows Christ's faith?

1. It *ratifies* what Christ did for us.

a. Ratify (def.): to make officially valid.

b. Until what Christ did is ratified it is of no value to us.

(1) 'All that Christ did and suffered for the human race is of no value', said Calvin.

(2) That is, until we believe.

2. This means that all that Christ did for us is ours!

a. He died for all, believed perfectly for all, fulfilled the Law for all, yes; but it is not ours until we too believe.

b. But *when* we believe all he did for us is ours:

(1) Forgiveness of sins.

(2) Imputation of righteousness.

(3) Eternal life.

B. Three things, then, are instantly granted to us the moment we believe: forgiveness; righteousness; eternal life.

'O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood
To every believer the promise of God;
The vilest offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.'

1. The forgiveness of sins. Romans 3:25; Eph. 1:7.

a. It is difficult to know which comes first in the order of Paul's thinking:

(1) Imputation of righteousness, implied by Rom. 3:21.

(2) Forgiveness of sins.

b. All three are granted simultaneously:

(1) Forgiveness of sins.

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(2) Imputation of righteousness.

(3) Eternal life.

2. What we tend to be most conscious of is the forgiveness of all our sins.

a. This is because we have been convicted of our sins, and made sorry.

b. Thus the feeling of being forgiven is very wonderful indeed. I John 1:9.

3. This too seems to have been most prominent in Luke's theology. Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18.

a. It anticipates the doctrine of imputation - not of righteousness but of 'no sin'. Romans 4:6-8.

b. In other words, God instantly puts to our credit 'no sin' - it is just as if I'd never sinned!

(1) This is the way it is in God's sight.

(2) The 'forgiveness' however is what we feel by faith in God's promise.

C. The imputation of righteousness. Rom. 4:5.

1. In a word: the righteousness of Christ is put to our credit.

a. How do we know that? Because:

(1) He came to fulfil the Law. Matt. 5:17.

(2) He did everything for us - is our substitute. Rom. 5:10.

b. Thus everything he did is transferred to us as though we did it ourselves; e.g.:

(1) Being baptised. Matt. 3:15.

(2) Believing perfectly. Gal. 2:16.

(3) Perfect sanctification. I Cor. 1:30.

2. This implicitly proves the eternal security of the believer.

a. For this is the way God sees us from the moment of faith; as righteous as Jesus.

b. This means that in the sight of God I am no more righteous fifty years after my conversion than I was the day I was saved.

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- c. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. Rom. 3:27; Eph. 2:8-9.
- D.** Eternal life. John 3:16.
- 1. Eternal life in the New Testament is described in four ways:
 - a. The very life of Jesus - the Eternal Son. I John 1:1.
 - b. The quality of knowing God. John 17:3; I Tim. 6:12.
 - c. Life beyond the grave. Mark 10:30.
 - d. Heaven as opposed to hell. Matt. 25:46.
 - 2. The life eternal that issues from justification by faith is basically two things, in this order:
 - a. That we will go to heaven when we die.
 - b. That we may come to know God intimately.
- E.** Note: justification by faith must be understood as being *forensic* (that is, legal).
- 1. Justification is a legal transaction: what is lawful in God's eyes.
 - 2. It is a double transaction:
 - a. What happened with regard to the Father and the Son at the cross of Calvary.
 - b. What happens between God and the believer at the moment of conversion.

CONCLUSION

- A.** Because justification by faith is forensic there is nothing necessarily that we may feel.
- 1. We may not feel righteous - but we are.
 - 2. We may not feel forgiven - but we are.
- B.** We need to see that this is the way God sees us, not the way we see ourselves.
- 1. But if God sees us as righteous, that is what matters.
 - 2. But when we are *convinced* that God sees us that way, we have *assurance* of our justification.