

## JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH – LESSON #1

(Delivered by Head Pastor James A. Clark)

There is no topic in the Holy Bible that should bring more blessing, encouragement and assurance, than the Doctrine of Justification by Faith. Simply defined, “justify” means to declare just or righteous, not to MAKE righteous. This is a judicial term, with the verdict given by the judge after scrutinizing the prisoner according to law. Justification negatively means pardon for sin, and positively, acceptance before God, with full rights and privileges as His Son Jesus Christ. The Doctrine of Justification has to do with Redemption. And there are two great aspects of redemption.

First, the LORD Jesus Christ’s work for us: We may call this GOD’s work in Christ. This work of redemption was done entirely apart from us and without our assistance. Our LORD Jesus lived a perfect life FOR us. He “died FOR our sins according to the Scriptures,” as Paul tells us in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:3. “He was delivered FOR our offences,” says Romans 4:25. We read these words in Hebrews, “He (Christ) entered the sanctuary having obtained eternal redemption FOR US,” and “He ever liveth to make intercession FOR them,” and “He appears in the presence of GOD FOR us.”

Secondly, we have the Holy Spirit’s work IN us. Without the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer, the sacrifice of the LORD Jesus Christ would be of no avail. The Spirit works IN what Christ has worked OUT. The Holy Spirit carries out GOD’s work of Grace IN us. These two aspects of redemption are illustrated by the two streams of blood and water which flowed from the pierced side of our Savior Jesus Christ. He offers His blood for us in the sanctuary above. The Spirit--represented by the water--sanctifies the heart of the believer in the LORD Jesus. The Reformers of Martin Luther’s time were led to abandon the idea that the Holy Spirit’s work in them could make them righteous in the sight of God. These were men who had experienced, as few men have, the power of sin in their lives. They knew what it was to struggle for holiness of heart. They believed that holiness came only from God, and they tried to grasp enough holiness in their lives in order that they could be acceptable before God.

Even so, being honest men, they could never see enough of God’s Grace in their experience to give them any confidence toward Him. Indeed, as they looked deep within their poor hearts, they saw sin in the form of pride, selfishness, unbelief, unresponsiveness to God’s love, and egotism. They despaired to ever begin to be justified by virtue of God’s work of Grace in them. But something suddenly was revealed to them, and they rediscovered Paul’s doctrine of “Justification by Faith.” In the book of Romans, Paul sets forth the gospel truth that the sinner is NOT justified by an infused righteousness, but by an IMPUTED righteousness, meaning a righteousness that is found wholly in another, the LORD Jesus Christ. A believer is not justified by virtue of what God has wrought out IN him, but by virtue of what God has wrought out IN the LORD Jesus Christ, Romans 3:19-28:

“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.<sup>20</sup> Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.<sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God apart from the law

is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,<sup>22</sup> even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,<sup>24</sup> being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,<sup>25</sup> whom God set forth *as* a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,<sup>26</sup> to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.<sup>27</sup> Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith.<sup>28</sup> Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law."

Martin Luther was professor of Sacred Theology in the University of Wittenberg; and in November of 1515 he began to expound Paul's epistle to the Romans to his students. He continued this course until the following September. As he prepared these lectures he came more and more to appreciate the doctrine of "Justification by Faith," as preached by the apostle Paul. Here is what Luther wrote:

"I greatly longed to understand Paul's epistle to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, "the righteousness of God," because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous. Night and day I pondered until...I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, He justifies US by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the "righteousness of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressively sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to Heaven."

As a result of this enlightenment, perhaps the most far-reaching religious event since the first century occurred, namely the Reformation. Let us study what Martin Luther found so glorious and encouraging. Paul had proved in chapter one of Romans that the Gentiles were under God's wrath, and most justly so. Actually in the previous chapters, Paul showed that all men are under God's wrath for their sin. He said this is true of average Gentiles, who sin flagrantly, and of those, especially Jews, who are self-righteous. In the latter group are those who are only able to see the sins of others--those who claim to be ignorant of the moral law. The Jews who trust mere knowledge of the Mosaic Law, or outward performance of the ceremonies of the Law are also included.

Paul began chapter three by stating that Jews and Gentiles alike are living under the power of sin. He accuses both of an involvement in sin that arises from the inner hearts of men and can lead only to condemnation. The Jews would agree that Gentiles did not keep the Law, but Paul is saying that the Jews, too, are condemned, even though they feel superior to the Gentiles. Let us read Romans 3:19-20 again:

"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.<sup>20</sup> Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin."

The Law is central in Paul's mind here in his conclusion, as he prepares to present a righteousness without the Law. Law, here in verse 19, refers to the Old Testament. The Law makes the entire world "guilty before God." This means that all are "caught with the goods," as it were, and must pay the penalty. The attempt to be "justified," that is, to be declared just in God's sight, in His court--by obeying the Law fails. The Law only makes us aware of just how sinful we really are, for Paul says, "By the Law comes the knowledge of sin." Paul talks about sin in Romans, but it is not his delight to beat away at the subject; he would much rather accentuate the positive. But if a person does not know that his house is on fire, why would he call the fire department?

The simple truth is that the whole world, Jew and Gentile, are shown to have offended God and must pay for it. Paul says, in essence, "The Law that you are so proud of does not declare anyone just, but does the reverse; it exposes sin. Paul, then, is starting to discuss God's new way of justifying people apart from the Law--by His righteousness, not THEIR works. This fulfillment is a courtroom matter, something decided by a judge. It is a crucial point to grasp. Paul is telling the Jew, "Don't point your finger so self-righteously at the Gentile. The Law, which you admit you are under, is speaking to YOU and it condemns you, too."

Martin Luther said, "that forgiveness of sin is a problem which needs God to solve it, for sinful man cannot solve it, though he desperately needs a solution to it; it is his problem; it is he who has to be forgiven." He continues, "and what Paul tells us here is that the problem has been worthily solved by the grace of God, who has set forth Christ as the solution; the means of forgiveness, the guarantor of our acceptance. All that is required of sinful man is that he should embrace by faith what God's grace has provided." Paul quotes passages from the Old Testament that are intended to stop every mouth, that of the Jew especially, and to show a whole world guilty before God. It is a condemned world; condemned by the Judge Himself. To save it or any man in it, there can be no means but His mercy according to verses 19 and 20.

Paul says that all men are sinners, and he declares that law-works cannot save. After all of them are done, they leave a man in sin, Galatians 2:15-16. The reason Law cannot save is because it has neither the office nor the power of salvation. Paul, again, says, "One might as well attempt to cross the river on a millstone as to get into Heaven by works of Law. If he would sink without the stone, he must sink deeper with it. If the Gentile perishes 'without law,' much more will the Jew who has it, for it only makes his sin more apparent. What Paul says in Romans 5 is that by the Law is the knowledge of sin; he is asserting in the most emphatic manner that the Jew cannot hope for salvation by its observance. It cannot lift him out of the wide morass of his own sin. It only shows him how deep and how hopelessly he is embedded in it.

Up until now Paul had brought out that every son of Adam is not only lost, but condemned. His penalty is continuance in sin, not only while he sins, but because he has sinned. All the world is "guilty before God," Paul says. In a court of justice it is only after every defense has failed and the law has been shown to be broken, and it is only at this point that the appeal is made to the judge for clemency. Paul's epistle to the Romans brought us to this point. Simply put, Paul says that both the Greeks, who trusted in wisdom, and the Jews, whose confidence rested in the Law, have missed the way. And Paul clearly points out the

insufficiency of works, "for no human being will be justified in His (God's) sight by works of Law." A person is justified when he is not accounted guilty; he is acquitted, he is reckoned as righteous before God, The word denotes the verdict which is rendered, and comes from the law courts. After due trial the charges against a man are dismissed, and he is treated as an upright person.

It may also be noted that although a man can be treated as righteous without necessarily being MADE righteous, there must be sufficient grounds for doing so. From this it follows that what he is declared to be, he will more perfectly become! The apostle Paul says that the law is incapable of justifying men, but that is not its proper function after all; it cannot fairly be expected to accomplish more than its given task. Paul says, "Through the Law, comes the knowledge of sin." The Law may show us our duty, though it does not enable us to do it. In the process, then, it succeeds in teaching us our sinfulness. We become aware of the contrast between what we do and what we OUGHT to do. The proper task of the Law is to develop conscience, and it does this by awakening in us the consciousness of sin. According to verse 20, no one will be declared just when scrutinized by God, according to the Law. The Law does not reveal our holiness; it reveals our sin. So much for trusting our good lives to gain us right standing with God!

The question to be answered, in essence, is this, "How can men be saved from sin?" Paul tells us, "all are under sin." The whole world is guilty before God. By the deeds of the Law can no flesh be justified before God! Is there no remedy then? Is there no salvation? Yes; God has provided a way in Jesus Christ, who manifests the divine righteousness, who has made atonement for sin through His blood; and by faith in Him all who believe are forgiven and made holy in heart and life. They are "justified."

The Jews thought that because they were set apart for a higher training by special revelation and care, they would be therefore saved whether they did right or wrong. They considered themselves to be God's own people. How could they be lost then? Paul, though, shows them that salvation is salvation from sin, and they were not saved from sin. Lest they should not see this he brings a picture of sinful men, Jew and Gentile, out of their very own Scriptures: Romans 3:10-18; Romans 3:19-20. Paul is speaking to those who had the Law, the Jews. Therefore, the description of the sinfulness of Jew and Gentile recorded in Romans is not intended to imply that every Jew and every Gentile was such a monster of iniquity in outward conduct. A long list of worthy Jews described in Scriptures declares the contrary.

This description, though, shows the possibilities of sin: what sin is; not in the seed, but in the harvest; not in the buds, but in the tree; not in the blossom, but in the fruit. It shows what sin can become under favorable conditions; in a rich soil, with free opportunity for development. Every sin carries with it this possibility. The picture of sin that Paul paints shows the pressing necessity for a Redeemer, for some means of deliverance. Verse 20 says, "No man can justify himself before God by a perfect performance of the Law's demands; indeed it is the straight-edge of the Law that shows us how crooked we are." (Philipps translation).

Sin works two evils in the human soul: it separates the soul from God, and it is a disease. But "justification" is the setting of the soul right in its relationship with God, and includes the removal of both the evils that sin works. Justification implies forgiveness; the being

received into the family of God, and treated as if we had never sinned. We are surrounded by love and made heirs of God. Righteousness is necessarily the object of religion. God's work in us cannot be complete until we are perfectly holy in heart and life, even as God is holy. Justification as contrasted with sanctification lays the emphasis on the first of these. As the remedy for sin, it must include both righteousness and holiness. But Paul points out definitely that there is NO justification by the Law. In fact, those under the Law were a sorrowful failure and the Law could not make them righteous; and that shows that the Law alone was a sorrowful failure. The good men under the Law were not made good by the Law, but by faith, as Paul takes a whole chapter--Romans 4--to prove to us.

Martin Luther laid aside his ambitions and begged from door to door for his monastery. He climbed the steps of Pilate's staircase in Rome on his knees, but he could not reach the righteousness that he sought. He could only enter into the battle of life which Paul described in chapter 8, with never a glimpse of the victory at the close of that chapter. There is nothing in the Law alone that can make men holy. Education alone never makes a man better. Creeds pasted on the memory; good principles learned by rote--a mechanical way of doing something, without thought, or lessons in right and wrong will not get rid of vicious natural desires. But, if in place of making a child UNDERSTAND that something is right or wrong, you make him FEEL it; if you make virtue LOVED and evil HATED; if you produce a state of mind to which proper behavior is natural, spontaneous, instinctive, then you do some good.

That is exactly what the Gospel does when it gives the new heart and fills the soul with the love of God. The Law has no power to forgive. Even perfect keeping of it in the future would not atone for past sins. It could not change the fact, nor remove the guilt, nor take away the punishment. Let us use an illustration. Two gentlemen are talking; the one says to his friend, "How would you like to live in a place where no one drinks any liquor, nor takes any drugs?" His companion replies, "That would be wonderful; I would love it. But do you mean to say that there is a place where there is no stealing; cheating, forgery, adultery, or any crime?" "There is no such place; it sounds too good to be true; take me there." The friend answers, "Yes, there is such a place; the state prison."

To the sinner, the Law is a perfect STANDARD, by which he can realize how far short he comes to what is required of him. The PENALTY makes him realize the greatness of the evil of sin. Punishment is the "Cain-mark" which God has put upon sin to show its terrible nature. It awakens the conscience as nothing else can do. Men often laugh at sin until they begin to eat its bitter fruit. To those who desire to be good the law gives the knowledge of what he OUGHT to do.

Thus we read, "So that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." When one preaches in human wisdom, he will get human results; but when he preaches in the power of the Spirit, he will get lasting results. The outcome will be not men-followers but Spirit-filled followers of the living Christ. So often some people in the Sunday Service will be stirred by the message given, even to the point of shedding tears. They may exclaim, "I feel I have been drifting, and now I am back again; I just feel so good." It is almost frightening to hear people talking about feelings, because so often this is a mere emotional experience that will not last more than a few days. There is a common danger to be stirred by dynamic preaching rather than moved to repentance by

the Holy Spirit. I am not suggesting that the Holy Spirit does not work through one's emotions. We cannot divorce the emotions from any experience in life. But there is a great danger of having an emotional experience only, without a real heart experience with Christ through the Holy Spirit. Those who are moved by the Spirit will no longer trust in the wisdom of the flesh, but in the power of the Almighty God. Amen.

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