

# THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

## WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

### QUESTION # 73.

*(Larger Catechism)*

Q #73. *How doth faith justify a sinner in the sight of God?*

A. Faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of those other graces which do always accompany it, or of good works that are the fruits of it,<sup>1</sup> nor as if the grace of faith, or any act thereof, were imputed to him for his justification;<sup>2</sup> but only as it is an instrument by which he receiveth and applieth Christ and his righteousness.<sup>3</sup>

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Question 1—*Does faith justify a sinner because of the graces which accompany it or the good works which are the fruits of it?*

*Answer*—Although there are other graces which always accompany faith and the good works which flow from it, none of these are said to justify a sinner in the sight of God, Phil. 1:11. There is an inseparable connection between faith and all other graces; so, though distinguished, it is never separate from them for they are considered fruits of the Spirit, Eph. 5:9. The apostle reckons several graces which are connected with faith and proceed from the same Spirit, Gal. 5:22, 23. The same apostle commends the church at Thessalonica for their “work of faith,” which is connected with other graces as both a labor of love and patience of hope, 1 Thess. 1:3. The apostle Peter exhorts the church to add grace to grace in such a manner that supposes all these graces ought to be connected together, 2 Pet. 1:5-7. The apostle James calls that a “dead faith” which has not other works or graces joined with it, Jas. 2:17. Indeed, these graces and works are not only connected with it, but flow from it, or are the fruits of it, Rom. 6:22; Jas. 2:26. This grace, when exercised in a right manner, will have a tendency, in some degree, to purge the soul from that moral impurity which proceeds out of the heart of man, and is inconsistent with saving faith, thus, the heart is said to be “purified by faith,” Acts 15:9. Elsewhere, we read of faith exciting acts of love, both to God and man, which contain a summary of practical religion, Gal. 5:6. Additionally, it enables Christians to do or suffer great things for Christ’s sake, 1 John 5:4. Notwithstanding the connection of other graces with faith, and with those works which flow from it, we are never said in Scripture to be justified by these graces, for our justification by faith is put in opposition to any performances on our part, Rom. 3:28.

Question 2—*Is the grace of faith, or any act thereof, imputed for the justification of the sinner?*

*Answer*—Our justification cannot be founded upon the grace of faith, as if the faith itself in acting was a substitute for the required righteousness, otherwise we would not believe unto righteousness but our belief would be righteousness, Rom. 10:10. Thus, faith is not in the place of righteousness but it is that which lays to your account the righteousness of another, Rom. 4:5. The outstanding debt of perfect obedience due from us, and the punishment to which we are liable according to the sanction of the divine law, should make

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<sup>1</sup> Gal. 3:11; Rom. 3:28.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. 4:5; 10:10.

<sup>3</sup> John 1:12; Phil. 3:9; Gal. 2:16.

us infer that no obedience performed by us is capable of making satisfaction for our sin, 2 Tim. 1:9. This view of justifying faith, as replacing an actual righteousness, turns faith into a meriting thing contrary to its actual nature, Eph. 2:8.

Neither can our justification be founded on our repentance, though Scripture sometimes speaks in a manner to lend support to this opinion, Acts 3:19. This supposes that justification contains nothing but a forgiveness of sin, when it includes a trusting upon Christ for his righteousness, and in him alone, Jer. 33:16. Nor should we think that the apostle founds our forgiveness of sin upon our repentance, for we are justified by faith without the works of the law, Gal. 3:11.

Question 3—*How does faith justify?*

*Answer*—Justification stands in the ability to plead one's own innocence in the case of charges of crimes being committed; or, in the ability to plead one's own sincerity if charged with hypocrisy, as Job against his accusers, Job 27:5, 6. So, too, David, when complaining of the ill treatment which he received at the hands of his enemies and persecutors, did the same, Ps. 7:8. Elsewhere, also, when he was charged with false accusations, his words intimate that, how much soever he might be charged with the contrary vices, he was, with regard to them, innocent, 2 Sam. 22:21-25.

When a person stands at the tribunal of God, as all sinners must do, Heb. 9:27; when bringing in his plea for justification in his sight, he has nothing to plead but Christ's righteousness, Ps. 143:2; Eph. 1:6, 7; and faith is the grace which pleads it, Rom. 5:1. On this account, we are said to be justified by faith, or in the way of believing, Gal. 2:16. Faith does not justify by presenting or pleading itself, or any other grace which accompanies or flows from it, as the cause why God should forgive sin, or give us a right to eternal life, Tit. 3:5; for no grace has a sufficient worth or excellency to procure these blessings, Tit. 3:7. When we are said to be justified by faith, it is by faith as apprehending, pleading, or laying hold on Christ's righteousness, Rom. 3:24, 25. Agreeably to the idea of an instrument, we are said to be justified, not for faith, but by it, Phil. 3:9. Christ's righteousness is that which procures a discharge from condemnation for all for whom it was wrought out, John 1:12; and faith is the hand which receives it, whereby a person has a right to conclude that it was wrought out for him, Gal. 2:20. Christ's righteousness is that which has a tendency to enrich and adorn the soul, Rev. 21:2; and faith is the hand which receives it, whereby it becomes ours in a way of fiducial application, Rom. 3:22. As the righteousness of Christ is compared to a glorious robe which renders the soul beautiful, or is its highest and chief ornament, Isa. 61:10; so it is by faith that this robe is put on, Ezek. 16:14. Hence, Christ's righteousness justifies, as it is the cause of our discharge, Rom. 4:24, 25; faith justifies as the instrument which applies this discharge to us, Rom. 4:20-22. Accordingly, faith is considered as that which seeks and finds life in Christ, Rom. 1:17.

We call faith an instrument rather than a condition of our justification, because the word condition is generally used to signify that for the sake of which a benefit is conferred, rather than the instrument by which it is applied, as in our justification, Heb. 10:38. We do not deny that faith is the condition of our claim to Christ's righteousness, Hab. 2:4; or that it is God's ordinance without which we have no ground to conclude our interest in it, Acts 15:11. We must distinguish between it being a condition of forgiveness, and its being the condition of our visible and apparent right to forgiveness, John 3:36. There is Christ's righteousness as wrought out for all who were given him by the Father, 1 Cor. 1:30; and that faith which gives us ground to conclude the privilege belongs to us in particular, 2 Cor. 5:21.