

Conclusion

We need to be clear. If justification is by the sinner's works, then no sinner will ever be justified, no sinner can ever be justified. All men are condemned to everlasting death, damnation, misery, hell. It is as stark as that. God demands perfection in works, perfection in righteousness. *And no sinner can provide it.* As Scripture teaches:

Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. For he who said: 'Do not commit adultery', also said: 'Do not murder'. If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law (Jas. 2:10-11).

None is righteous, no, not one... By works of the law no human being will be justified in [God's] sight... What becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law (Rom. 3:10,20,27-28).

How wretched must the sinner be who attempts justification by works! Unless he is deeply conceited, he knows he can never reach the standard. He knows that one offence ruins all. He knows – or else he is grossly ignorant or self-deceived – that even his righteousness is useless and worse – it is offensive to God:

All our righteous acts are like filthy rags (Isa. 64:6).

So how can a sinner be justified?

We... know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified... For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law'. Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because 'the righteous will live by

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faith'. The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says: 'The person who does these things will live by them'. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole [or tree]'. He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit (Gal. 2:15-16; 3:10-14).

Yes, works are essential for justification – perfect works, that is. Praise God, Christ finished his work, and all who trust the perfect, finished work of Christ are justified! But it must be trusting Christ and his work alone, it must be faith alone, and it must be on the basis of God's free and sovereign grace alone. All these words must be taken in the fullest meaning: the words must not be used with their meaning sucked out of them. Christ's work, and Christ's work alone, brings everlasting joy to the sinner who trusts the Redeemer.

In the words of Horatius Bonar:

*Not what these hands have done
Can save this guilty soul;
Not what this toiling flesh has borne
Can make my spirit whole.*

*Not what I feel or do
Can give me peace with God;
Not all my prayers, and sighs, and tears
Can bear my awful load.*

*Thy work alone, O Christ,
Can ease this weight of sin;
Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God,
Can give me peace within.*

*Thy love to me, O God,
Not mine, O Lord to thee,
Can rid me of this dark unrest
And set my spirit free.*

*Thy grace alone, O God,
To me can pardon speak;
Thy pow'r alone, O Son of God,
Can this sore bondage break!*

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*No other work, save thine,
No other blood will do;
No strength save that which is divine,
Can bear me safely through.*

Or in the words of Augustus Toplady:

*A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercy I sing;
Nor fear, with thy righteousness on,
My person and off'ring to bring;
The terrors of law and of God
With me can have nothing to do;
My Saviour's obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view.*

As for the believer's works, yes, his works are essential. But here again we must be clear. Justification leading to works is one thing – it is right; works for progressive sanctification following justification by faith alone on the basis of God's grace alone through the merits of Christ alone – yes, that is biblical. But getting the order wrong is fatal. Faith and works leading to justification is diabolical.

Let me close by repeating once more that which I have been trying to argue throughout this booklet:

Justification is by faith alone, on the basis of God's grace alone, through the person and finished work of Christ alone.

1. Believers: believe it, and hold on to it (Rev. 2:25; 3:3,8,11). Never yield an inch on it. As you value your life, maintain it.
2. Preachers: preach it; do not merely lecture on it; proclaim it, proclaim it with all the passion, earnestness and vigour you can. Plead with sinners to trust Christ to be justified.
3. Unbelievers: believe it. More: trust Christ, and trust him alone, trust his finished work, trust no one and nothing else for your justification. And trust him now!