

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

Number 230

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April 2004

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The Biblical Covenant of Grace

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Editor's Note: *This essay is an excerpt from Not Reformed at All: Medievalism in "Reformed" Churches, a new book responding to Douglas Wilson's book "Reformed" Is Not Enough: Recovering the Objectivity of the Covenant. Not Reformed at All is available from The Trinity Foundation for \$9.95, plus \$6.00 shipping and handling.*

The New Testament is a fuller, clearer, and more systematic revelation of Jesus Christ than the Old. The New Covenant is superior to the Old, as the author of the book of *Hebrews* argues at length, and the revelation of the New Covenant is superior to the Old. Both are, of course, the Word of God, but "in these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son [not merely by the prophets], who [is] the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person."

Not only does the New Testament give us a fuller, clearer, and more systematic revelation of Jesus Christ than the Old, it also is the authoritative interpretation of the Old. It does this in four ways: (1) by commenting explicitly upon the text of the Old Testament; (2) by incorporating Old Testament texts into its own arguments; (3) by repealing portions of the Mosaic system that are obsolete; and (4) by correcting the common misinterpretations of the Old Testament taught by the Jewish religious leaders of the first century – what some recent theologians call "Second Temple Judaism." Perhaps the most obvious example of the last is Christ's Sermon on the Mount, in which he corrects the false teaching of the rabbis in this way: "You have heard it said...but I say unto you."

There are many examples of the first three methods – commentary on and incorporation of the text of the Old Testament itself, and repeal of its national and sacrificial system – and the one that we shall look at most closely is Paul's

letter to the Romans. In this letter, the Apostle Paul is the inspired and authoritative interpreter of the Covenant of Grace; any interpretation of the Covenant that conflicts with the authoritative interpretation written by the Holy Spirit and Paul, either by appealing to the teachings of Judaism, or by imposing its own construction on the text of the Old Testament, is false.

Now, what does Paul teach about the Covenant of Grace in *Romans*? First, Paul denies that there is any corporate salvation, any offer of corporate salvation, or corporate election to salvation, as the unbelieving Jews of that day commonly thought. They were falsely assured of their favor with God and of their salvation because they were children of Abraham, in solidarity with the patriarch with whom God had made the covenant. But Paul denounces that assurance in *Romans* 2 and declares the Jews more guilty before God than the Gentiles:

Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know his will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written. For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your

circumcision has become uncircumcision.... For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God [*Romans 2:17-29*].

Paul here denies that there is any group justification, corporate election to salvation, or corporate salvation. Rather than assuring their salvation, their outward advantages – chiefly the oracles of God, the Scriptures – condemned them more severely than the Gentiles, who did not have any special revelation from God. Paul concludes his argument with these words: “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. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (*Romans 3:19-20*).

The next step in Paul’s argument is to assert not only justification by belief alone, but to insist that justification is taught in the Old Testament: “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by *The Law and the Prophets*” (*Romans 3:21*). Paul explicitly attacks the Jewish notion that righteousness comes by the law, and insists that nothing of the sort is taught in *The Law and the Prophets*; in fact, *The Law and the Prophets* teaches that righteousness comes “apart from the law.” Furthermore, Paul attacked the Jewish misunderstanding of the covenant by denying that God was the God of all loyal, circumcised Jews because he had entered into covenant with Abraham: “Or is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith” (*Romans 3:29-30*).

Notice Paul’s reason for saying that God is the God of the Gentiles as well as the Jews: justification by faith alone. It was not circumcision, nor Torah, nor descent from Abraham that guaranteed the fulfillment of the promise “I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” Today, it is not baptism, nor church membership, nor godly heritage nor covenant faithfulness that guarantees fulfillment of that promise, but God alone.

So far in this passage, Paul has asserted:

1. that the circumcision of the Jews does not make them pleasing to God;
2. that being the physical children of Abraham and bearing the sign of the covenant are not assurances of favor with God;
3. that there is no group insurance policy that insures a loyal, circumcised child of Abraham election or salvation;
4. that all circumcised Jews are as guilty before God as

uncircumcised Gentiles, and more so;

5. that what makes a true Jew is the invisible circumcision of the heart (which Gentiles may have, and some do have), not the visible circumcision of the flesh;
6. that no one, Jew or Gentile, will be justified by the deeds of the law, done at any time in his life;
7. that justification by belief alone is taught in the Old Testament (which he calls *The Law and the Prophets*), and all the Jews should have understood it;
8. that God is God of both Gentiles and Jews, because justification is by belief, not heritage, alone;
9. that belief alone makes God our God, and we his people, thus uniting us to Christ and fulfilling the promise God made to Abraham;
10. that righteousness does not come by the law.

Paul continues his explanation of the Covenant of Grace by focusing on Abraham, whose descendants the Jews were. In *Romans 4* Paul mentions the doctrine of imputation 11 times – a doctrine that the Jews in general simply did not understand. Abraham was saved by an imputed righteousness, a righteousness not his own. He was saved while he was still uncircumcised. Physical circumcision, to which the Jews looked for assurance of their favor with God, had no part to play in Abraham’s salvation – and it has no part to play in the salvation of his children either. “For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law [and no one does], but if you are a breaker of the law [and everyone is] your circumcision has become uncircumcision” (*Romans 2:25*). Further, “this blessedness” (*Romans 4:6, 9*) that is, salvation apart from works, comes on all who believe, whether they are physically circumcised or not. Paul further explained the reasons:

For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all [*Romans 4:13-16*].

The first reason for justification by faith alone that Paul presents is that the promise was not made to Abraham or his seed through the law, that is through their law-keeping, as the Jews misunderstood the Covenant, but through the righteousness received by faith alone. Paul says that if those who are of the law – those who bear the marks of the covenant and keep their noses clean, those whom Calvin called

“saintlings” – are heirs of the promise, then the promise is made of no effect, for they are not saved, but objects of wrath. Notice Paul’s argument here: The Jewish misinterpretation of the Covenant makes the promise of the Covenant ineffective (“of no effect”), for the circumcised are not saved, but are objects of wrath, just as he had proved in chapter 2. This is the same Jewish misinterpretation of the Covenant that infected medieval churches, Reformed churches in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and American Presbyterian and Reformed churches in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

In the place of an effective, efficacious Covenant of Grace, in which God writes his laws in the minds of all the members of the Covenant, these churches substitute an ineffective, objective covenant in which reprobate (children of the flesh) and elect (children of the promise) alike receive the promises of God in baptism. In opposition to this counterfeit covenant, Paul teaches a Covenant of Grace in which “the promise might be sure to all the seed.” There is no sure promise of salvation in Wilson’s counterfeit covenant. His appeal to ritual baptism for assurance is asinine, for he admits that some baptized people go to Hell.

At this point in his argument, the Apostle Paul discusses the role of the Mediator of the Covenant of Grace, who fulfills the law of God perfectly on behalf of and instead of his people, and who dies the death demanded by the law for their sin, paying the full penalty due to them. Because he is the Mediator of the Covenant for his people, their union with Christ, the Covenant Head, results in their receiving the free gift of salvation, freedom from the condemnation of the law (they are “dead to the law through the body of Christ” their substitute), and all the blessings of the Covenant of Grace, including regeneration and faith itself. This is exactly what God had promised in *Jeremiah 31*, as repeated in *Hebrews 8*.

This “new covenant” (not the covenant made with Moses, and explained in greater detail in the New Testament), this Covenant of Grace, is personal (“I will put”; “all shall know me”); individual (“I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts”); and absolutely effective (“I will be their God and they shall be my people;” “None of them shall teach his neighbor...for all shall know me”); and “not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt.” The Mosaic covenant was public, corporate, and ineffective (“because they did not continue in my covenant”). By this efficacious, sovereign Covenant of Grace, believers are justified and made sons of God:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be

the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he predestined, these he also called; whom he called, these he also justified; and whom he justified, these he also glorified.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord [*Romans 8:28-39*].

This is God’s sovereign Covenant of Grace, and it is wholly efficacious; no one and nothing can thwart it. This Covenant is made exclusively with Christ and the elect, to whom alone the promises of life and salvation belong.

At this stage in his extended argument, Paul uses the doctrine of election (individual, of course) to defend God against the charge that he has not kept his covenant promises to the Jews, and his Word is of no effect. Paul’s argument is, in summary, that God had made no promises of salvation to all the children of Abraham, nor even to all the circumcised, but to his chosen people only. Just as God’s election is of some only, and Christ died for some only, so in the Covenant of Grace the promise of salvation is to some only. The Covenant is not a promise to all men, not even to all those that are circumcised or baptized, but only to those chosen by God in Christ from before the foundation of the world.

Paul writes: “But it is not that the Word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, “In Isaac your seed shall be called” (*Romans 9:6-7*). Paul insists that God keeps his promises, that his Word has in fact “taken effect.” The problem is not with God’s promises, but with those Jews who misunderstand the promises, thinking that God had made promises to all the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. To this Paul replies: “They are not all Israel who are of Israel,” and “they are not all children of Abraham,” echoing his statement in chapter 2: “He is not a Jew who is one outwardly,” visibly, but “he is a Jew who is one inwardly,” invisibly. Paul quotes the Old Testament making that plain, if only the Jews had believed Moses’ writing in *Genesis 21:12*: “In Isaac [not

Ishmael] your seed shall be called." But while they trusted in Moses, as Jesus said, they did not understand or believe Moses' words in *Genesis* 21.

Paul continues: "That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. For this is the word of promise: 'At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son'" (*Romans* 9:8-9). Paul draws an antithesis between the children of God and the children of the flesh, who are not the children of promise or of God: "These are not the children of God." Those whom the Jews think are the children of God are not. Not only this, but "when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of him who calls), it was said to her, 'The older shall serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated'" (*Romans* 9:10-13).

Paul carries the argument one step further. Not only is the line of circumcised Ishmael not to be identified with the children of God and made recipients of the promises, even though they were children of Abraham and bore the sign of the covenant, but not all the children of Isaac are children of God either: "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." The children of God are those whom God has elected, and to them alone are the promises of the Covenant of Grace made.

Paul continues his argument against the unbelieving Jews: "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.' So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy" (*Romans* 9:14-16). The sinner's performance, before or after baptism or circumcision, contributes precisely nothing to his salvation. The Covenant is sovereign; its terms were set unilaterally; and those terms are fulfilled by the God-man who represents his people. The Covenant of Grace accomplishes exactly what God intends. It is to a remnant, not to all Israelites, nor to all church members, that God made his promises:

Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved. For he will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, because the Lord will make a short work upon the Earth." And as Isaiah said before: "Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah."

What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness.

Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on him will not be put to shame" [*Romans* 9:27-33].

Paul explains the Covenant of Grace in terms of God's election of individuals. Any interpretation of the Covenant that excludes or minimizes the doctrine of individual election is a false interpretation. Today ministers in good standing in several denominations, not just Wilson's, are teaching that the Covenant of Grace is conditional, that it is made with all who are baptized, that it is better understood if we ignore the doctrine of election, and that the salvation of the baptized depends upon their fulfilling the terms of the covenant. To the ten points by which we summarized Paul's teaching earlier, we must now add several more:

11. the sole ground of Abraham's salvation is the imputed righteousness of Christ;
12. this perfect, extrinsic righteousness was imputed to Abraham before he was circumcised; so circumcision (which represents all works done in obedience to God) was neither a condition nor a ground of his salvation, but a result;
13. Christ's righteousness is imputed to believing Jews and Gentiles without partiality;
14. the instrument of this imputation is belief alone, not law-keeping;
15. the Covenant promises of God are not to all the children of Abraham, but only to the children of promise;
16. the Covenant of Grace is made by God the Father with Christ the Mediator, who, acting in the place of (as a substitute for) and on behalf of (as their legal representative), only the people the Father had given him, perfectly fulfills the terms of the Covenant and obtains complete salvation for his people;
17. in the Covenant of Grace God promises all the blessings of the Covenant, including faith and eternal life, to his people;
18. God keeps his Covenant promises by preserving his people for eternity, so that nothing – including they themselves – can separate them from the love of Christ;
19. there is no unrighteousness with God, for he has not broken any promises to his people, but has carried them out fully in Christ.

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April 1996

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How Can a Just God Forgive a Sinful Man?

Edited by John W. Robbins

On what basis does God accept a man? This is the most fundamental of all questions concerning salvation. Several answers have been given:

1. A life of complete obedience to the Law
2. Faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ
3. Some other way

Many people in the churches give the wrong answer. In seminaries many professors give the wrong answer.

This question demands a clear answer. And in order to give such an answer, we must be clear in our own minds about this important matter. This was the great issue of the Reformation. Some feel that times have changed and therefore old questions are irrelevant. But we believe the question is as relevant today as it was in the days of Paul or Luther. It is the most fundamental question that plagues the human heart. It is at the root of all problems in society.

The correct answer is Number 1: The only basis upon which any person is accepted by God is *a life of obedience to the Law*.

The Answer of Legalism

Most people choose Number 2 rather than Number 1 because they do not want to appear to be legalists. Most people choose faith in the Gospel of Christ

because they think it is against legalism. But answer Number 2 is actually the legalistic answer.

What is the basis, foundation, or ground on which a man is acceptable to God? None of the Reformers and no Bible scholar worthy of the Reformation tradition has ever said that faith is the basis or ground of acceptance with God. Of all attributes that God implants in the human heart, faith stands right at the top. It is the gift of God and the root of all virtues. It is the principal work of the Holy Spirit. But irrespective of the princely nature of faith, it never is the basis, foundation, or ground of salvation. One of the perils of the modern religious scene is the idea that it is *because* of my faith, *because* I am born again, or *because* I trust in Jesus that God accepts me.

To say that faith is the basis of acceptance with God is legalistic, because it offers to God something that is within me as the basis of acceptance with God. (That God gives faith makes no difference to the principle. Faith is still a quality within me.) If you take the time to look at the decrees of the Council of Trent on justification, you will see that Number 2 is the classic Roman Catholic answer. The Reformers and the Bible stood against that position. In this century of theological decline, however, the Biblical and Reformation doctrine was eclipsed by the Arminian and Roman doctrines, which hold that faith is the basis of our acceptance with God—that faith is a work that we do, a quality that we have, that makes us acceptable to a holy God.

The Answer of Faith

Now let us look at *Romans* 2: 12, 13:

For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; for not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

The Bible is unequivocal. None but the doers of the Law is accepted by God. That is an eternal principle. God will not turn from it. He has never changed his mind. A life of perfect obedience—that is to say, a life of righteousness—is the only possible basis of acceptance with the holy and righteous God.

The trouble with so much evangelism today is that the Gospel is presented as a smart way of skirting the Law. It has come to mean a smart trick whereby we can jump over the claims of the Law straight into the presence of God. We think that the Gospel means that God is less demanding than he used to be.

God demands a life of perfect obedience to his Law. No lame, imperfect, halfway, partial obedience will satisfy his holiness: "the doers of the Law shall be justified." James says that if we offend in only one point, we are lawbreakers. This fundamental basis of Biblical Christianity has been overlooked in the twentieth century. There is little true preaching of the Law or the Gospel today. We have neglected to preach the holiness and majesty of God. God is presented as an easygoing benevolence who frantically runs around Heaven seeking how he may please insatiably worldly people. No wonder we're in such a religious quagmire. We need the Law. We need to know the holy requirement of God. We need to know the standard of God. We need to preach the standard of God in such a way that people will cry out, "How then can I be saved?"

When Paul contrasts the way of faith and the way of works in *Romans* and *Galatians*, he is not contrasting faith and works as such, but faith and our weak, puny, defective works. We must not get the idea that faith is against the Law. In *Romans*

3:31 Paul argues that the way of faith is not against the Law. Faith establishes the Law. Faith is not the negation of the Law of God. Faith honors the Law. Faith acknowledges that it is only on the basis of answer Number 1—a life of complete obedience to the Law—that God will ever accept a man.

Man's Predicament

In the early chapters of *Romans* Paul shows the perilous predicament of man: Neither Gentile nor Jew is able to meet the holy standard of God that is demanded in the Law of God. It is to rectify this situation that Paul talks—as he does in *Romans* 3:21-26—about Jesus Christ and the righteousness of God. But we often jump into *Romans* 3:21-26 without giving due attention to the force of the preceding argument. Let us remember that in *Romans* 1:13 to 3:20 Paul seeks to hammer home with unsurpassed clarity and inspired force the message that the whole human race is in a terrible predicament because man has not been able to give God what is God's due—and that is nothing less than perfect conformity to God's Law. The Christian Gospel honors the Law of God. Faith honors the Law of God. Since faith always depends on and takes its value from its object, faith will always answer: "The only basis by which a man is accepted by God is a life of complete obedience to the Law."

The Righteousness of God

"But now *the righteousness of God*. . . ." God intervenes into our terrible predicament. It was this "righteousness of God" around which and out of which the Reformation exploded. What is meant by the "righteousness of God"? *The righteousness of God is that which is measured by the character of God himself*. It is that which is commensurate with the holiness of God. It has God as its measure. It is his holy, spotless, divine character. *This righteousness of God is the demand of God*. His justice demands it of every man, woman, and child. This is what he has always demanded, and this is what he will always demand of us, because he could never demand anything less than his own perfect being.

This is the matter over which Martin Luther wrestled. He almost despaired when he saw this aspect of "the righteousness of God." He struggled with all his power and ascetic principles to give to God what God required. Yet his conscience gave him no rest. "Have I done enough? Have I done it well enough? How can I be sure?" It is because we today are not wrestling with these same convictions that the Gospel is virtually unknown. The Gospel only makes sense against the backdrop of God's radical and uncompromising demand for complete and total righteousness. When men and women understand that a life of perfect conformity to the Law is the only basis of acceptance with God, and when they are distressed as to how they can meet that demand, then, and only then, will the Gospel make any sense.

What is so wrong with much of our religiosity today is that we are not asking theological questions. We rather want to know, "How can God please me? How can he raise my self-esteem? How can God make me happy and successful?" But the fundamental question of the Bible and the fundamental question that gave birth to the Reformation was, "How can I please God?" Only when this question is an urgent necessity will the righteousness of God make any sense.

The righteousness of God is that which God himself provides. When Luther discovered this, the Reformation was born. That is the good news. That is the Gospel. The righteousness of Jesus Christ is both the demand of God and God's provision for his people. If you want to see what God demands of you and me, look at the perfect life of Jesus Christ. He was truly man as man was meant to be. Jesus is the righteousness of God in that he is the provision of God. When he was born into this world, it was a birth such as had not been since Adam fell. He came to Earth to live a life that no one had lived since Adam fell. If you look at the whole stream of human history from the Fall to the end of the world, you will see only thirty-three years that God accepts. Jesus came to give the perfect sacrifice, the substitutionary ransom for the failure of men and women to live righteously before God. He rose from the tomb and ascended to the right hand of

God, so that right now he is in God's presence as a perfect Man on behalf of all those who trust him.

Jesus came and lived a life of perfect obedience to the Law of God. His life matched the holiness of God at every point. What the holiness of God demanded, Jesus provided. Have you ever read *Concerning the Incarnation of the Word of God*, by Athanasius, or *Cur Deus Homo? (Why Did God Become Man?)* by Anselm? We ought to read these classics instead of the pious pap that dominates the shelves of our religious bookstores. These men grappled with the question of the Incarnation. God the Son had to become and did become man in order to provide for us what God the Father's holy self-consistency demanded.

The Action of Faith

Jesus provided the righteousness that God requires, but we are still obligated to agree with God in order to be justified. Christ's obedience to the law will not help you unless you agree to the transaction. How does that come about? It comes about *through* (not because of) faith. Faith is assent to the solution that God has provided in Christ Jesus.

When we come before God in repentance, we say, "Lord, I have not kept your holy law. I have not done what your holiness requires. You have done it for me in Jesus Christ. Mine are Jesus' birth, his sinless life, his death, resurrection and ascension." That is the language of faith. Faith accepts the utter sinfulness of self and the utter righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. *The righteousness of God, therefore, is my righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ.* Sometimes charismatics ask, "Brother, have you made the exciting discovery of the Spirit-filled life?" The tragedy is that, when thus confronted, many Christians feel spiritually nude and embarrassed. The only answer of a man or woman of faith is, "Yes, what a life! I was born perfectly, I have lived commensurately with the holiness of God himself in my Substitute, Jesus Christ." When we boast about that Spirit-filled life of Christ (which is ours by faith alone), it makes every other so-called Spirit-filled life look insignificant and sinful by comparison. We have not outbragged the

charismatics, who boast of their own lives, by boasting about the life of Christ.

The righteousness of God, which is mine, through faith, is in Jesus Christ. It not a quality in my heart. This is the emphasis of *Romans 3:21-26*—"in Christ Jesus." This righteousness is found *alone* in Jesus at God's right hand. Paul tells the Colossians:

If you then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the Earth. For you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory (*Colossians 3:1-4*).

So don't set your affection on the wrong life. Your life of sanctification, which of necessity follows justification, is a shadow of the Christian's true life at God's right hand. Our life is hid with Christ in God.

Conclusion

A life of obedience to the law—that which God demands—has been performed by the doing and the dying of Jesus Christ—his sinless life and his obedient death. I am able to present it to God by faith. This is not presenting the righteousness that I have within, but it is presenting the righteousness that is in Jesus Christ. It is, as Luther said, the alien righteousness of Christ. It is reserved in Heaven as a great treasure for people who live among thieves. Heaven is a safe place for it to be. Thus, God accepts us only on the basis of a perfect righteousness. He saves us justly. This means that our salvation is grounded on the justice of God. That is good news. We sometimes wonder if the mercy of God will run out. The pastor might tell us that God is merciful. Yet we may say, "But he doesn't know my heart. Is God that merciful?" But have you thought it possible that God would cease to be just? No! That is why we think his mercy may run out—because we know how just he is.

Here is the glorious message of *Romans 3:25, 26*, which is not taught today: The Gospel is a

declaration of God's justice *and* his mercy. God has saved us in a way that affirms that he is just. He has not skirted the Law. He has not been inconsistent. He has not repealed the Law. Before God could reject a man who trusts in Jesus Christ, he would first have to become unjust. "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus" (*Romans 3:26*). So our security is grounded firmly in God's justice.

God has never changed his mind. He has always required perfect obedience to his law. And when he looked out at an utterly desperate world, he came himself—God the Son in a donkey's feedbox; God the Son allowing the Palestinian dust to sift through his toes as he fulfilled his own Law on our behalf. Faith acknowledges the Law because Jesus acknowledged the Law. Faith always chooses the perfect, law-conforming life of Jesus as the only basis for acceptance with God.

Extensively revised and adapted from Present Truth, a defunct magazine.

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

December 1993

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Only One Way of Salvation

John Charles Ryle

Is there more than one road to Heaven? Is there more than one way in which the soul of man can be saved? This is the question which I propose to consider in this paper, and I shall begin the consideration by quoting a text of Scripture: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under Heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (*Acts 4:12*).

These words are striking in themselves; but they are much more striking if we observe when and by whom they were spoken. They were spoken by a poor and friendless Christian, in the midst of a persecuting Jewish Council. It was a grand confession of Christ.

They were spoken by the lips of the Apostle Peter. This is the man who, a few weeks before, forsook Jesus and fled: this is the very man who three times over denied his Lord. There is another spirit in him now! He stands up boldly before priests and Sadducees, and tells them the truth to their face: "This is the stone that was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

First, let me explain the doctrine laid down by St. Peter.

Let us make sure that we rightly understand what the Apostle means. He says of Christ, "Neither is

there salvation in any other." Now what does this mean? On our clearly seeing this very much depends.

He means that no one can be saved from sin – its guilt, its power, and its consequences – excepting by Jesus Christ. He means that no one can have peace with God the Father – obtain pardon in this world, and escape wrath to come in the next – excepting through the atonement and mediation of Jesus Christ.

In Christ alone God's rich provision of salvation for sinners is treasured up: by Christ alone God's abundant mercies come down from Heaven to Earth. Christ's blood alone can cleanse us; Christ's righteousness alone can clothe us; Christ's merit alone can give us a title to Heaven. Jews and Gentiles, learned and unlearned, kings and poor men – all alike must either be saved by the Lord Jesus, or lost forever.

And the Apostle adds emphatically, "There is none other name under Heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." There is no other person commissioned, sealed, and appointed by God the Father to be the Saviour of sinners, excepting Christ. The keys of life and death are committed to His hand, and all who would be saved must go to Him.

There was but one place of safety in the day when the flood came upon the Earth: that place was

Noah's ark. All other places and devices – mountains, towers, trees, rafts, boats – all were alike useless. So also there is but one hiding-place for the sinner who would escape the storm of God's anger; he must venture his soul on Christ.

There was but one man to whom the Egyptians could go in time of famine, when they wanted food: They must go to Joseph; it was a waste of time to go to anyone else. So also there is but One to whom hungering souls must go, if they would not perish forever: they must go to Christ. There was but one word that could save the lives of the Ephraimites in the day when the Gileadites contended with them, and took the fords of Jordan (*Judges* 12): They must say "Shibboleth," or die. Just so there is but one Name that will avail us when we stand at the gate of Heaven: we must name the Name of Jesus as our only hope, or be cast away everlastingly.

Such is the doctrine of the text. "No salvation but by Jesus Christ; in Him plenty of salvation – salvation to the uttermost, salvation for the very chief of sinners; out of Him no salvation at all." It is in perfect harmony with our Lord's own words in St. John's Gospel – "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (*John* 14:6). It is the same thing that Paul tells the Corinthians: "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid which is Jesus Christ" (*1 Corinthians* 3:11). And it is the same that St. John tells us in his first Epistle: "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (*1 John* 5:12). All these texts come to one and the same point – no salvation but by Jesus Christ.

Let us make sure that we understand this before we pass on. Men are apt to think, "This is all old news; these are ancient things: who knoweth not such truths as these? Of course, we believe there is no salvation but by Christ." But I ask my readers to mark well what I say. Make sure that you understand this doctrine, or else by and by you will stumble, and be offended at the statements I have yet to make in this paper.

We are to venture the whole salvation of our souls on Christ, and on Christ only. We are to cast loose

completely and entirely from all other hopes and trusts. We are not to rest partly on Christ, partly on doing all we can, partly on keeping our church, partly on receiving the sacrament. In the matter of our justification Christ is to be *all*. This is the doctrine of the text.

Heaven is before us, and Christ the only door into it; Hell beneath us, and Christ alone able to deliver us from it; the devil behind us, and Christ the only refuge from his wrath and accusations; the law against us, and Christ alone able to redeem us; sin weighing us down, and Christ alone able to put it away. This is the doctrine of the text.

Now do we see it? I hope we do. But I fear many think so who may find, before laying down this paper that they do not....

Truth and Love

There are few parts of the subject which seem to me to be more important than this. The truth I have been trying to set before my readers bears so strongly on the condition of a great proportion of mankind, that I consider it would be mere affectation on my part not to say something about it. If Christ is the only way of salvation, what are we to feel about many people in the world? This is the point I am now going to take up.

I believe that many persons would go with me so far as I have gone, and would go no further. They will allow my premises: They will have nothing to say to my conclusions. They think it uncharitable to say anything which appears to condemn others. For my part I cannot understand such charity. It seems to me the kind of charity which would see a neighbour drinking slow poison, but never interfere to stop him; which would allow emigrants to embark in a leaky, ill-found vessel, and not interfere to prevent them; which would see a blind man walking near a precipice, and think it wrong to cry out, and tell him there was danger.

The greatest charity is to tell the greatest quantity of truth. It is no charity to hide the legitimate consequences of such a saying of St. Peter as we are now considering, or to shut our eyes against them. And I solemnly call on every one who really

believes there is no salvation in any but Christ – and none other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved – I solemnly call on that person to give me his attention, while I set before him some of the tremendous consequences which the doctrine we are considering involves....

Uselessness of Religion

One mighty consequence, then, which seems to be learned from the text which forms the keynote of this paper, is the utter uselessness of any religion without Christ.

There are many to be found in Christendom at this day who have a religion of this kind. They would not like to be called Deists, but Deists they are. That there is a God, that there is what they are pleased to call Providence, that God is merciful, that there will be a state after death – this is about the sum and substance of their creed; and as to the distinguishing tenets of Christianity, they do not seem to recognize them at all. Now I denounce such a system as a baseless fabric – its seeming foundation man's fancy – its hopes an utter delusion. The god of such people is an idol of their own invention, and not the glorious God of the Scriptures – a miserably imperfect being, even on their own showing, without holiness, without justice, without any attribute but that of vague, indiscriminate mercy. Such a religion may possibly do as a toy to live with: It is far too unreal to die with. It utterly fails to meet the wants of man's conscience: It offers no remedy; it affords no rest for the soles of our feet; it cannot comfort, for it cannot save. Let us beware of it, if we love life. Let us beware of a religion without Christ.

Another consequence to be learned from the text is, the folly of any religion in which Christ has not the first place. I need not remind my readers how many hold a system of this kind. The Socinian tells us that Christ was a mere man; that His blood had no more efficacy than that of another; that His death on the cross was not a real atonement and propitiation of man's sins; and that, after all, doing is the way to Heaven, and not believing. I solemnly declare that I believe such a system is ruinous to men's souls. It seems to me to strike at the root of the whole plan

of salvation which God has revealed in the Bible, and practically to nullify the greater part of the Scriptures. It overthrows the priesthood of the Lord Jesus, and strips Him of His office. It converts the whole system of the law of Moses, touching sacrifices and ordinances, into a meaningless form. It seems to say that the sacrifice of Cain was just as good as the sacrifice of Abel. It turns man adrift on a sea of uncertainty, by plucking from under him the finished work of a divine Mediator. Let us beware of it, no less than of Deism, if we love life. Let us beware of the least attempt to depreciate and undervalue Christ's Person, offices or work. The name whereby alone we can be saved, is a name above every name, and the slightest contempt poured upon it is an insult to the King of kings. The salvation of our souls has been laid by God the Father on Christ, and no other. If He were not very God of very God, He never could accomplish it, and there could be no salvation at all.

Another consequence to be learned from our text is the great error committed by those who add anything to Christ as necessary to salvation. It is an easy thing to profess belief in the Trinity, and reverence for our Lord Jesus Christ, and yet to make some addition to Christ as the ground of hope, and so to overthrow the doctrine of the text as really and completely as by denying it altogether.

The Church of Rome does this systematically. She adds things to Christianity over and above the requirements of the Gospel, of her own invention. She speaks as if Christ's finished work was not a sufficient foundation for a sinner's soul, and as if it were not enough to say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." She sends men to priests and confessors, to penances and absolution, to masses and extreme unction, to fasting and bodily mortification, to the Virgin Mary and the saints – as if these things could add to the safety there is in Christ Jesus. And in doing this she sins against the doctrine of God's Word with a high hand. Let us beware of any Romish hankering after additions to the simple way of the Gospel, from whatever quarter it may come....

Sincerity

The last consequence which seems to me to be learned from our text is the utter absurdity of supposing that we ought to be satisfied with a man's state of soul, if he is only earnest and sincere.

This is a very common heresy indeed, and one against which we all need to be on our guard. There are thousands who say in the present day, "We have nothing to do with the opinions of others. They may perhaps be mistaken, though it is possible they are right and we wrong: but, if they are sincere and earnest, we hope they will be saved, even as we." And all this sounds liberal and charitable, and people like to fancy their own views are so! To such an extreme length has this erroneous idea run, that many are content to describe a Christian as "an earnest man," and seem to think this vague definition is quite sufficient!

Now I believe such notions are entirely contradictory to the Bible, whatever else they may be. I cannot find in Scripture that any one ever got to Heaven merely by sincerity, or was accepted with God if he was only earnest in maintaining his own views. The priests of Baal were earnest and sincere when they cut themselves with knives and lancets till the blood gushed out; but that did not prevent Elijah from commanding them to be treated as wicked idolaters. Manasseh, King of Judah, was doubtless earnest and sincere when he burned his children in the fire to Moloch; but who does not know that he brought on himself great guilt by so doing? The Apostle Paul, when a Pharisee, was earnest and sincere while he made havoc of the Church, but when his eyes were opened he mourned over this special wickedness. Let us beware of allowing for a moment that sincerity is everything, and that we have no right to speak ill of a man's spiritual state because of the opinions he holds, if he is only earnest in holding them. On such principles, the Druidical sacrifices, the car of Juggernaut, the Indian suttees, the systematic murders of the Thugs, the fires of Smithfield might each and all be defended. It will not stand: It will not bear the test of Scripture. Once allow such notions to be true, and we may as well throw our Bibles aside altogether. Sincerity is not Christ, and therefore sincerity cannot put away sin.

I dare be sure these consequences sound very unpleasant to the minds of some who may read them. But I say, calmly and advisedly, that a religion without Christ, a religion that takes away from Christ, a religion that adds anything to Christ, a religion that puts sincerity in the place of Christ – all are dangerous: All are to be avoided, because all are alike contrary to the doctrine of Scripture.

Some readers may not like this. I am sorry for it. They think me uncharitable, illiberal, narrow-minded, bigoted, and so forth. Be it so. But they will not tell me my doctrine is not that of the Word of God and of the Church of England, whose minister I am. That doctrine is, salvation in Christ to the very uttermost – but out of Christ no salvation at all.

Relativism

I feel it a duty to bear my solemn testimony against the spirit of the day we live in, to warn men against its infection. It is not Atheism I fear so much, in the present times, as Pantheism. It is not the system which says nothing is true, so much as the system which says everything is true. It is not the system which says there is no Saviour, so much as the system which says there are many saviours, and many ways to peace! – It is the system which is so liberal, that it dares not say anything is false. It is the system which is so charitable, that it will allow everything to be true. It is the system which seems ready to honour others as well as our Lord Jesus Christ, to class them all together, and to think well of all. Confucius and Zoroaster, Socrates and Mahomet, the Indian Brahmins and the African devil-worshippers, Arius and Pelagius, Ignatius Loyola and Socinus – all are to be treated respectfully; none is to be condemned. It is the system which bids us smile complacently on all creeds and systems of religion. The Bible and the Koran, the Hindu Vedas and the Persian Zendavesta, the old wives' fables of Rabbinical writers and the rubbish of Patristic traditions, the Racovian catechism and the Thirty-nine Articles, the revelations of Emanuel Swedenborg and the Book of Mormon of Joseph Smith – all, all are to be listened to: None is to be denounced as lies. It is the system which is so scrupulous about the feelings of

others, that we are never to say they are wrong. It is the system which is so liberal that it calls a man a bigot, if he dares to say, "I know my views are right." This is the system, this is the tone of feeling which I fear in this day, and this is the system which I desire emphatically to testify against and denounce.

What is it all but a bowing down before a great idol, speciously called liberality? What is it all but a sacrificing of truth upon the altar of a caricature of charity? What is it all but the worship of a shadow, a phantom, and an unreality? What can be more absurd than to profess ourselves content with "earnestness," when we do not know what we are earnest about? Let us take heed lest we are carried away by the delusion. Has the Lord God spoken to us in the Bible, or has He not? Has He shown us the way of salvation plainly and distinctly in that Bible, or has He not? Has He declared to us the dangerous state of all out of that way, or has He not? Let us gird up the loins of our minds, and look these questions fairly in the face, and give them an honest answer. Tell us that there is some other inspired book beside the Bible, and then we shall know what you mean. Tell us that the whole Bible is not inspired, and then we shall know where to meet you. But grant for a moment that the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible is God's truth, and then I know not in what way we can escape the doctrine of the text. From the liberality which says everybody is right, from the charity which forbids us to say anybody is wrong, from the peace which is bought at the expense of truth – may the good Lord deliver us!

For my own part, I frankly confess, I find no resting-place between downright distinct Evangelical Christianity and downright infidelity, whatever others may find. I see no half-way house between them; or else I see the houses that are roofless and cannot shelter my weary soul. I can see consistency in an infidel, however much I may pity him. I can see consistency in the full maintenance of Evangelical truth. But as to a middle course between the two – I cannot see it; and I say so plainly. Let it be called illiberal and uncharitable. I can hear God's voice nowhere except in the Bible, and I can see no salvation for sinners in the Bible

excepting through Jesus Christ. In Him I see abundance; out of Him I see none. And as for those who hold religions in which Christ is not all, whoever they may be, I have a most uncomfortable feeling about their safety. I do not for a moment say that none of them will be saved; but I say that those who are saved will be saved by their disagreement with their own principles, and in spite of their own systems. The man who wrote the famous line, "He can't be wrong whose life is in the right," was a great poet undoubtedly, but he was a wretched divine....

No Other Name

If there is no salvation excepting in Christ, let us try to do good to the souls of all who do not know Him as a Saviour. There are millions in this miserable condition – millions in foreign lands, millions in our own country, millions who are not trusting in Christ. We ought to feel for them if we are true Christians; we ought to pray for them; we ought to work for them, while there is yet time. Do we really believe that Christ is the only way to Heaven? Then let us live as if we believed it.

Let us look round the circle of our own relatives and friends, count them up one by one, and think how many of them are not yet in Christ. Let us try to do good to them in some way or other, and act as a man should act who believes his friends to be in danger. Let us not be content with their being kind and amiable, gentle and good-tempered, moral and courteous. Let us rather be miserable about them till they come to Christ, and trust in Him. I know all this may sound like enthusiasm and fanaticism. I wish there were more of it in the world. Anything, I am sure, is better than a quiet indifference about the souls of others, as if everybody was on the way to Heaven. Nothing, to my mind, so proves our little faith, as our little feeling about the spiritual condition of those around us....

This is the true charity, to believe all things and hope all things, so long as we see Bible doctrines maintained and Christ exalted. Christ must be the single standard by which all opinions must be measured. Let us honour all who honour Him; but let us never forget that the same apostle Paul who

wrote about charity, says also, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema." If our charity and liberality are wider than that of the Bible, they are worth nothing at all. Indiscriminate love is no love at all, and indiscriminate approbation of all religious opinions, is only a new name for infidelity. Let us hold out the right hand to all who love the Lord Jesus, but let us beware how we go beyond this.

Lastly, if there is no salvation excepting by Christ, we must not be surprised if ministers of the Gospel preach much about Him. They cannot tell us too much about the Name which is above every name. We cannot hear of Him too often. We may hear too much about controversy in sermons; we may hear too much of works and duties, of forms, of ceremonies, of sacraments and ordinances; but there is one subject which we never hear too much of: We can never hear too much of Christ.

When ministers are wearied of preaching Him, they are false ministers. When people are wearied of hearing of Him, their souls are in an unhealthy state. When ministers have preached Him in all their lives, the half of His excellence will remain untold. When hearers see Him face to face in the day of His appearing, they will find there was more in Him than their hearts ever conceived.