

Salvation—Justification: Faith (13th)

(In this podcast we are continuing the study of faith as an *act* regarding the doctrine of justification.)

In the previous study we began discussing faith as an *act*. We showed that faith is a product of the Spirit of God given to each child of grace in regeneration and that it is not produced by man in any way. Furthermore we found that the Scriptures tell us that faith is always living and producing fruit. Now our desire is to talk about the act of faith in connection with justification.

In previous studies we saw that justification is a legal declaration declaring a person not guilty before the bar of justice. It was demonstrated that man is justified before God by the righteousness of Christ charged to the account of the redeemed. Additionally, it was discovered that this originated in eternity where Christ was ordained as our Surety (cf. Hebrews 7:22) and that God always considered the elect secure in Christ. This righteousness was worked out by our Lord in the redemptive work of Jesus when He came to the earth and fulfilled the law, shed His blood, died, and rose again for His people. This is identified as the Person and work of Christ.

Many people, if not most, believe that a person is justified by God when he believes or exercises faith. Their premise is that when the gospel is preached and a person exercises faith at that time and then God imputes or charges the righteousness of Christ to the account of the individual. If justification is at faith, then how is it that Romans 4:25 plainly says that Christ was “delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification”? Either the work of justification was at the resurrection of Christ or not. In fact the following verse, Roman 5:1, begins with “therefore being justified.” (Remember that there were no verse or chapter divisions in the original Greek manuscripts.) Actually, the grammatical construction of the word “justified” would be in our modern English “having been justified.” (The Greek conjugation is aorist, passive, participle. It should also be noted that in the Greek text that the first word is δικαιωθέντες and the second word is οὖν reading “having been justified, therefore by faith we have peace with God.”) Since faith does not create and can only receive what is, and Christ was resurrected for our justification, it is by faith that we receive experimentally or are made aware of our justification in our consciousness.

When we connect Romans 5:2 with verse one, we see that it is by faith that we have access to the glorious ocean of the grace of God. Having been justified by the life, death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are plunged into this ocean of grace. Imagine someone standing in this ocean of grace—justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ—and by faith he bathes and soaks in the refreshing satisfaction of standing before God “holy and without blame,” Ephesians 1:4. Not only this, but in verses 8-10 we find that God commended His love to us and Christ died for us while we were sinners. Furthermore, we were justified by the blood of Christ and were reconciled to God when we were enemies. All of this was done prior to faith because a believer is not classified as an enemy of God. Yes, we do not want to minimize the importance and essential of faith because the Scriptures make it clear that the elect of God are brought to faith. Also we are not prepared to quantify or qualify how much one must believe or how much faith one will have. We are individuals and each child of grace does not have the same understanding, teaching, or exercise of obedience in his life. While there are similarities in the growth of each child of grace, we are not identical in our journey under the providential dealings of God. Therefore, we will turn our attention to some passages that teach that the people of God are brought to faith and believe on Christ.

Of the many passages that can be presented, allow me to begin with John chapter 10. Here our Lord made it plain that the sheep of God follow the Shepherd and they will not follow a stranger because they know the voice of the Shepherd and do not know the voice of a stranger. This knowledge is a deep awareness of Who Christ is and our love and trust of Him. In fact, in verse fourteen, our Lord said that He

not only knows the sheep but that the sheep know Him. Further in verse twenty-seven He said that the sheep hear His voice and follow Him. Immediately before this He said the reason people do not believe in Him is because they are not His sheep. What a glorious thing that God not only set His love on the elect before the world and Christ was their Surety from all eternity, and that the Son came and fulfilled the righteousness for our justification, but the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts so that we believe this glorious gospel as we labor in this low ground of sin and sorrow. Our hearing the gospel and believing it is not some chance happening but it is according to the providential workings of our glorious God and Savior. Robert Traill express it beautifully in a sermon on I Peter 1:1-4. Speaking of the elect of God scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, he said, "Wheresoever any of the elect of God are, gospel-grace will reach them; either they shall be brought where the light shines, or the light shall be sent after them to find them out. This is expressed by our Lord in two parables, Luke xv. the man seeking his lost sheep, and the woman looking for her lost piece of silver. Sometimes the elect are brought where the gospel is; and it is remarkable that the pouring out of the Spirit was adapted to the time of Pentecost: when there was the greatest assembly of the Jews from all parts of the world to worship there; then and there Christ and his gospel met them, Acts ii. 1. This is a matter of great consolation; gospel-grace will find out all the elect of God, wheresoever they are scattered; either the gospel shall be sent after them and find them out, or they shall be brought where it is." (*Work of Robert Traill*, Vol. 4, p. 10. The Banner of Truth Trust.) As we said before, faith is not only a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8) but belief is also given by His grace (Philippians 1:29).

This is further verified in II Thessalonians 2:13-14, "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." In no uncertain words, Paul wrote by inspiration that the Thessalonians saints were not only chosen to salvation but that it was "through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." Furthermore, God called the Thessalonians saints by the gospel as preached by Paul. This coincides with the testimony of Paul preaching the gospel at Antioch in Pisidia where it is said that "as many as were ordained to eternal life believed," Acts 13:48. Yes, while it is true that belief does not justify, those who are justified by the righteousness of Christ believe. In fact, Paul began his discourse here at Antioch with these words: "Be it known unto you therefore, men *and* brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses," Acts 13:38-39.

John in his first epistle bears witness to this as well. In verses thirteen through fourteen of the second chapter he addresses little children, young men, and fathers. (It matters not whether you believe these three groups are regarding physical age, spiritual maturity, or a combination of the two, it covers children of God of all ages from youth to maturity.) Notice that the little children know God the Father and if they know God they also know Christ. Remember that Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees that if God were their Father they would love Him, John 8:42. Even I John 2:23 testifies to this same truth when it says that "*he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.*" This corresponds with John 5:23b: "He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him." After little children is the group of young men. There we see that they "overcome the wicked one," "are strong," and "the word of God" abides in them. Regarding the fathers, they "know him *that is* from the beginning." Obviously, since the children and fathers know God from the beginning, the fathers equally possess those characteristics of the young men because they are in the middle of the little children and the fathers. In other words, regardless of one's stage or age of growth in the kingdom of God, he is not only regenerated but he lives in the knowledge of the Father and in obedience to the gospel of God. He is given faith in regeneration and that faith is active in the service of God. No, the act of faith does not justify, but the act of faith does receive into the conscience an awareness of the justify righteousness of Christ and rejoice in the riches of the finished works of our Savior, Christ Jesus. Many other passages could be supplied to support this truth;

however, these should be sufficient for any Bible believer. Yes, our Lord could have elected us and redeemed us by the Person and work of Christ and then let us go about in the world with the possibility that we might or might not know about the salvation for us now or a future life after death. Nevertheless our Heavenly Father is far more loving and gracious than any earthly father. He is sure to give us divine life in regeneration, nourish and feed us with the glorious gospel so that we rejoice in the finished work of Christ, and look forward to living with Him “holy and without blame in love” forever in the glory world. Our time is up for today, farewell.