

Salvation—Justification: Faith (14th)

(We are concluding the study of faith as an *act* regarding the doctrine of justification in this podcast.)

Too often people do not consider that Old Testament saints have the same faith as that of the New Testament. In fact, Galatians 3:7, 9 clearly say, “Know you therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.” “So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.” Regardless of how faith is manifested or exhibited in the life of a child of God, it is the same kind of faith. Ephesians 4:4-6 equally testifies to this in that it declares that we all are “called in one hope” of our “calling,” “one Lord, one faith,” “one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.” The reason that people in the Old Testament did not believe the gospel is the same as why people now do not believe. It is because it is not “mixed with faith.” Hebrews 4:2 testifies to this truth: “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard *it*.” Notice that it was the same gospel. There was not a separate gospel in the Old Testament. The gospel that was preached “unto them” is the same gospel preached “unto us”; that is, provided the gospel preached today is the one true gospel as confirmed in Galatians 1:6-7: “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.” (The Lord willing, we will discuss the gospel more in detail in the future.)

Books written, sermons preached, and theologians have lectured endeavoring to ascertain how much gospel one must believe or how accurate a particular theological system conforms to the truth of the gospel. Obviously the Scriptures are silent regarding this question. One thing is certain, each child of grace has faith and that faith is realized before God. Man may not be able to determine or evaluate how much faith one has but God knows. Even the writer of Hebrews affirmed that many were unnamed that “wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and *in* mountains, and *in* dens and caves of the earth,” Hebrews 11:37-38. As we scan our eyes over the entire eleventh chapter of Hebrews, there are some named that we likely would not think they truly had saving faith. Equally, when one would consider the thief on the cross there are questions as to how and why he knew what he knew. Nevertheless, within the short period of three hours he went from one scoffing and ridiculing the Lord (see Matthew 27:38-44) to one professing faith in Christ (see Luke 23:39-44). That faith was manifested in him is seen (1) by rebuking the other thief, (2) admitting that he was getting what was just by being crucified, (3) that Jesus was not guilty, (4) calling Jesus Lord, (5) that Jesus had a kingdom, (6) since Jesus had a kingdom He was a king, and (7) since Jesus would die on the cross He would have to come into His kingdom in the resurrection. Here are at least seven things that confirmed the faith of the thief. Equally, Abraham did not confess some theological system when he was in Er, but years before Genesis 15 we know that left Er by faith and obeyed God leaving that place “not knowing whither he went,” Hebrew 11:8. Since the book of Hebrews is devoted to affirming that the new covenant is better and superior to that of the old, it clearly establishes that the faith of the Old Testament is the same in quoting from Habakkuk 2:4, “Behold, his soul *which* is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith,” Hebrew 10:38. This is equally confirmed from Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11. Likewise, the people that lived by this same faith as listed in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews are from the Old Testament. Yes, the faith that is given by God (Ephesians 2:8; Philippians 1:29) is a living faith that produces works, James 2:17-26. In fact, just as faith is an evidence of justification so are works. This is what James is saying when he wrote that Abraham and Rahab were justified by works. As demonstrated before, the ground of justification is the righteousness of God and not our believing or faith exercised by us. Allow me to emphasize again, that

we must distinguish between the principle of faith and the act of faith and know that justification is by the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some may think that we are making much to do about nothing, but I assure you this is not the case. It is essential that we are clear and accurate regarding the doctrine of justification. It may well be the case that what I am about to say should have been said at the beginning of our study of justification because theologians and scholars for centuries have affirmed the importance of this doctrine. It has been said by many that Martin Luther said that justification is “the article which the church stands or falls.” Recently I was listening to a podcast by R. C. Sproul entitled *Justification by Faith Alone* wherein he affirmed that this was the central issue of the reformation. Regarding Luther’s statement, Justin Taylor wrote the following:

So what about the phrase attributed to Luther than *justificatio est articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*—“justification is the article by which the church stands and falls.”

From what I’ve been able to find, the first use of this exact phrase was by Lutheran theologian Balthasar Meisner who said that it was a “proverb of Luther” (*Anthropologia sacra* disputation 24, [Wittenberg: Johannes Gormannus, 1615]). [Source: [Arthur Carl Piepkorn](#) / [Jack Preus](#)]

In 1618 Reformed theologian Johann Heinrich Alsted wrote *articulus iustificationis dicitur articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* (in *Theologia scholastica didacta* [Hanover, 1618], p. 711)—“The article of justification is said to be the article by which the church stands or falls.” [Source: [Alister McGrath](#)]

We don’t have record of Luther using the exact phrase, but very close: *quia isto articulo stante stat Ecclesia, ruente ruit Ecclesia*—“Because if this article [of justification] stands, the church stands; if this article collapses, the church collapses.” (*WA* 40/3.352.3) [Source: [Alister McGrath](#)]

Luther certainly expressed the same thought in numerous ways, but this is the closest I’ve seen to the famous quote. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/luthers-saying/>

Regardless of the exact words of Luther, this belief has been affirmed by many for centuries. Therefore, if the truth of the doctrine of justification determines whether an ecclesiastical denomination or assembly stands or falls then what is believed about this doctrine is extremely important. The doctrine of justification is not merely a subject of Christian literature; it is pivotal regarding the authenticity of “the house of God . . . the pillar and ground of the truth,” I Timothy 3:15.

In his podcast, Sproul taught that justification by faith means that the word “by” in “by faith” is the instrumental cause of justification. He further used the example of Aristotle’s philosophy by saying that if an artist takes a piece of marble or some stone and carves out some object, the stone is the material cause and the hammer and chisel used by the artist is the instrumental cause. Therefore, one is justified only when he exercises faith because the faith that the individual puts forth is the instrumental cause of him being justified. Under such teaching, Christ died and secured justification for any who will believe. This presents the idea that Christ secured justification and/or salvation for anyone who will put or exercise his faith in Christ. Such proposal does not follow the teaching of the Bible that Christ died only for the elect and no more. It sets forth the idea that Christ died for someone but not anyone in particular; salvation is for someone who will believe. This leaves the idea that salvation is secured only by the means of faith and not by the righteousness of God. I realize that some will assert that this is a small thing and hardly worth discussing, but in reality the difference is greater than what is imagined on the surface. Either salvation and/or justification was secured and accomplished in the Person and work of Christ or at faith. Even when it is affirmed that the faith is not produced by man and that it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8), the fact of the matter is that justification is either by the means of faith or Christ. It cannot be both.

The Scriptures clearly teach that the ground of justification is the righteousness of God and not faith. Yes, we want to be clear. The believer does receive justification experimentally at faith, but one must first be judicially justified before he can receive it into his conscience. Faith does not justify; God justifies or pronounces one not guilty because of the finished work of Christ, Romans 8:33. Equally, God gives faith to each child of grace and when one believes the gospel he receives in his heart and conscious the truth of justification. No. The gospel does not produce the righteousness of God, it reveals the righteousness of God, cf. Romans 1:16-17, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." The gospel brings forth or brings to light faith, Romans 10:17. The gospel does not produce "life and immortality"; it brings "life and immortality to light," II Timothy 1:10. Therefore, let us be clear regarding the truth of justification being by the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ and the glorious beauty of the gospel of Christ revealing that truth to regenerated children of God by that faith given to them in the new birth. Let us continually remember the parting words of our Lord, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem," Luke 24:46-47.

Our time is expired for today. Farewell.