

Justification by faith



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The subject of “ Justification by Faith” is an argument, proposed by the Apostle Paul in Romans 1: 17 where he starts by introducing God’s revelation to humankind concerning unrighteousness: That this was a God-given revelation in the beginning and throughout man’s history (faith to faith) within the “ Gentile’s law of nature and the Jews law of Moses. However, Paul further exclaims, “ that neither of them could be justified by their obedience to the respective laws under which they were, but that they both stood in need of the righteousness of God.” [1] As Paul is strictly a preacher of the Gospel of salvation through Christ Jesus, there is no doubt he had to find another style of presenting the Good News to factions in opposition to one another.

His method of preaching in Romans catches the undivided attention of both the Jew and the Gentile Christian. Justification in the sight of God comes by faith in Christ Jesus alone, by which we can also avoid the wrath of God that is consequential to the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Certain cults, like the Jehovah’s Witnesses seek gratification by including their works to implement salvation and only adhere to particular scripture verses to defend their position.

They twist the interpretation of James 2: 18, 20, and 26 by ignoring Ephesians 2: 8-9, which is contrary to the analogy of faith and does not agree with the biblical map. Works are only what we offer out of thanks for the sacrifice Christ made for us but they search for every excuse and alternative possible and refuse abandon their false doctrine, which is a matter of their own “ free choice”. In actuality, there is no “ free choice”

because not accepting Christ Jesus as our personal savior accounts as a sin, in the eyes of God. (John 5: 26-29)

“ Justification” and “ Faith” Defined

Since we are speaking of “ Justification by Faith”, this is where it is appropriate to throw in the explanation of the two words, “ justification” and “ faith”.

Let Us Define “ Justification”

According to Verlyn D. Verbrugge’s *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, the Greek word “ justification” (dikaiōsis), defines a vindication or an acquittal (p. 147), a dismissal of criminal charges. We can best explain “ justification” by encountering someone having a traffic citation for speeding and that either he gets the infraction dismissed or he pays the fine. The driver may appear in court to dispute the citation but if found guilty the punishment for these charges remain impending. He is no longer guilty if the charges are dropped and they will be forgotten. If the fine remains and is not paid, penalty charges will be added and compounded until the driver pays the full amount incurred, is arrested, or is jailed and serves time as payment; or serves time and still pays for the infraction.

At this point, his license to drive can be suspended or revoked. The driver is no longer considered criminal once the fine is paid but this is where sin and the traffic citation divide. We cannot pay for our sin, our infractions against heaven. Our depravity is a spiritual matter that cannot be handled by physical means. Only a divine spiritual source can take care of both our spiritual, physical needs simultaneously, and that comes through blood

sacrifice only. Christ Jesus, " In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;" (Eph. 1: 7)

Definition of " Faith"

Now " faith" (πίστις), as defined by Verbrugge, offers another method of having that traffic ticket expunged. It " denotes the trust that someone may place in other people or in the gods, credibility, and credit in business, guarantees, or something entrusted" (p. 462). Again, in this case it is Christ Jesus, because he paid every debt of man's criminal activity. So here, we put our trust (" faith") in Jesus to pay the penalty for our crime much like a father might pull out his credit card to pay for his child's driving infringement; least the child ends up in jail for reoccurring and additional fees applied to that summons.

What, or Who, is God's Righteousness

In Romans 1: 17 we encounter the phrase " the righteousness of God". This phrase does not necessarily refer to God's uprightness, holiness, or purity, or His faithfulness in keeping His promises, nor the justice He will serve at the judgment but the means by which He provides salvation for humankind. Therefore, " the righteousness of God" refers to Christ Jesus for he obediently fulfilled all the prophecies of the Old Testament, which began in Genesis 3: 15, and faithfully accomplished the Father's promises.

" And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." NIV

Our faith in Christ Jesus, as our personal savior, justifies us in the sight of the Father because we testify to the pure, holy, and righteous blood that he shed

to save us from sin, hell, the grave and eternal death. Here “ the righteousness of God” and “ the revelation of the wrath of God” compare to having a significant relationship.

The Apostle Paul is actually teaching us that without receiving Christ and becoming a “ son of God” (John 1: 12) we remain criminals to the heavenly government of God and “ the wrath of God”, which is eternal separation from the Father becomes the reward (in this case, punishment) for our unrighteousness. We cannot save ourselves and anything we claim good enough to make us free from sin and afford us “ safe passage” into heaven is far and wide from what God sees as righteous (Isaiah 64: 6). Besides, if man could provide his own salvation, there would not have been a need for Jesus to give his life at Calvary and his doing so would have been in vain. (Acts 4: 12)

Paul's Theological Teachings

In Romans 6: 23, Paul teaches, “ the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” which means our salvation is a perfect salvation and could only be provided by God in the flesh (Emmanuel - God with us). We are saved from the stain of Adam's disobedience in the garden, the murderous character of our tainted blood, the captivity of the enemy of God (Satan) and from eternal death, which is a result of all that encompasses our sinful nature.

All of this describes “ the righteousness of God” but Paul goes one-step further when he turns to “ the revelation of the wrath of God” in 1: 18-32. In verse 19 Paul explains how the knowledge of right and wrong is revealed to man when he states, “ Because that which may be known of God is manifest
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in them; for God hath shewed it unto them." The knowledge of right and wrong, good and evil, righteousness and wickedness is made manifest within the heart of man even though " the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Genesis 8: 21). The Spirit of God in man (that is the remnant spirit of God in man) plants this innate knowledge, of good and evil, and no matter how we cut it, this is proof that God created man, for this is His trademark, benchmark or ISBN.

By the knowledge of good and evil in man, the homosexual knows his or her lifestyle is an " abomination" (Leviticus 18: 22; 20: 13; Deuteronomy 22: 5; 1 Corinthians 6: 9) to God as well as the reason why the thief escapes being caught. (Exodus 20: 15; Leviticus 19: 11; Jeremiah 2: 26) From this point, we can understand how both " the righteousness of God" and " the revelation of the wrath of God" are related to one another. Jesus Christ is God's righteousness and provides the only payment to expunge our criminality against heaven. God has created in man (revealed in man) the inborn knowledge of the difference between sin and righteousness.

Paul Refutes Jewish Ideology

Paul was a Pharisee within Judaism and understood all the ins-and-outs of their doctrine, which became a plus for Christians of his day and has become a major advantage for us today because it leads to the defense of Christianity against Judaism, as well as, other belief systems. In Judaism, " justification by faith" was national pride and was a form of idolatry because they idolized the fact they were Jews. They further believed that the sect with the most righteous form of living (by keeping the law), of all the Jewish communities (Scribes, Pharisees, Essenes, etc.), would enter into heaven. In

this, they believed the gentile would not qualify for salvation, seeing the Jews were the only chosen nation of God and possessed the Laws of God. They, the Jews, did not extend the blessing to other nations and held them as cursed of God, the products of eternal damnation. [2]

However, Paul refutes this ideology in Romans 10: 1-13, bringing into reason “ Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” (Romans 10: 3-4) Paul repeats this same doctrine to the Galatians, using different words: “ Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.” (Gal. 3: 21) Reading deeper into these two statements, Paul is expressing that the attitude, of the Jews, was nothing more than legalistic prejudiced against other nationalities and cultures but Paul corrects this in the second sentence of Romans 10: 3-4, where he refers to the “ culmination”.

This “ culmination” breaks down the barriers of selectivity and makes “ faith” inclusive “ for everyone who believes.” The use of the word “ culmination” concludes that Christ has fulfilled every requirement needed to save humankind, which then makes everyone (Jew and Gentile, alike) with faith in Christ Jesus, an inclusive entity. “ Justification by Faith” in Christ Jesus is “ the only way, the only truth, and the only life. And No man comes to the Father but by him” (John 14: 6) is what the Apostle Paul’s argument is all about. Paul leaves no doubt in the minds of Christians or the ungodly, unchurched peoples how salvation is attained. That it only comes through

being “justified” through our “faith” in what Christ has done on the Cross of Calvary for all humankind.

That he will return, looking to find a church without “spot or wrinkle” (Ephesians 5: 27). “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” (Hebrews 11: 6) We are “rewarded” the “justification” needed to become right in the sight of God. It is this writer’s opinion that Christ has already cleansed us of the “spot”, the sin we inherited from Adam’s disobedience when we accepted him as our personal savior but our “wrinkles”, our personal sins, still need ironing out. The final change will be “ironed out” on the day of rewards, the rapture because (as for now) we can only strive for the perfection but Christ will do the ultimate perfecting.

God’s Wrath in Paul’s Concept of Salvation

According to the “Evangelical Dictionary of Theology” by Baker House, there are six words to describe the emotions associated with God’s wrath. “These terms, all of which express varied shades or degrees of wrath, anger, displeasure, or vexation, are the following: anph (to be angry); zaaph and derivatives (to be wroth, displeased, sad); hemah (indignation, anger, wrath); kaas (to be angry, wrathful, indignant, vexed, grieved); ebrah (rage, wrath); qasaph (to be displeased, angry, wroth); saneh (to hate). In the New Testament, there are more than twenty references to the anger, wrath, or vengeance (orge) of God and a few references to indignation and displeasure (achthos).” [3]

Although there may appear to be varying degrees of God's wrath, I must go along with Paul's theology that " If you've committed one sin, you've committed them all." Let us return to Romans 6: 23, " For the wages of sin is death..." All sin leads to death and eternal condemnation. There is no leeway for what the secular world may deem, i. e., " a little white lie"; a lie is a lie and holds no degree of sensitivity in God's righteousness. Nevertheless, salvation is explained by Paul in Romans 5: 18, " Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." That gift is Christ Jesus as the apostle previously proclaimed, " For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2: 8, 9)

A Door with Two Sides

Dr. Elmer Towns, in his book " Core Christianity", compares " conversion to a door with two sides." " Human activity is on one side of the door, while God's activity is on the other side." When we convert to Christianity, we are pushing on the door to heaven and God, on the other side, regenerates us into new life. We are then born again and the world, God, sin, and ourselves appear to us in a different and opposing light of understanding. [4] If we are " pushing on heaven's door" then we have accepted Jesus because he states, " I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." In the case of the Apostle Paul, however, I interpret it as God opened the door and dragged him inside. His encounter with Jesus Christ made a life changing impact that not only altered

Paul's way of thinking and his mission but also rearranged the course of human and church history.

He, Paul, admittedly states this in Romans 1: 1, " Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God". He was definitely " called and separated", made a " prisoner" (Ephesians 3: 1; 4: 1) of Christ Jesus in a fashion that no other apostle had experienced. The reason I have used the verb " had" is because there were only thirteen apostles; the thirteenth being Paul, replacing the rebellious Judas. By biblical standards, an apostle is a person who was a Jew, had seen Jesus face-to-face, planted churches, and had authority over the church, in various regions. There are people today, using the title " apostle" unjustifiably because they do not fit all the requirements but may have an " apostolic anointing". Therefore, if they are given a title, perhaps it should be " anointed one" and not " apostle".

Paul on Faith

Paul has written many epistles, containing verses, about " faith". " Now faith is the substance of things hoped for..." (Heb. 11: 1); " But without faith it is impossible to please him:" (Heb. 11: 6). These are just a few examples, outside of the letter to the Romans, in which Paul speaks on " justification". " Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." (Gal. 3: 21) This was also another argument against the Jews, concerning their belief in salvation by the law.

Conclusion

I praise God for giving us the Apostle Paul, for through him we have an in depth analysis of what “ justification by faith” truly is, as long as we stick to verifying scripture with scripture and not take it upon ourselves to explain these things out of selfishness and ignorance. As I have tried to prove, there is no contention between Paul’s writings on faith and that of the Apostle James because James is not purporting that salvation comes by works. We must all come to the understanding that good deeds are what we do as a gesture of good will and appreciation for the blood sacrifice that Jesus Christ made to save us from sin, death, the grave and the eternal tortures of hell. The Apostle Paul also teaches, in 2 Timothy 4: 3, that “...the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;”

The time is here and now because we find these false doctrines just about everywhere we turn. Paul charges us to, “ Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” (2 Timothy 4: 2) We must also consider that, “ whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Romans 10: 13-15)

Paul teaches, in this verse, that it is our obligation to correct those who have not received the true doctrine of Christ. This charge is an extension to the Great Commission. Just as well as there are those who have not the gospel,

there are those that have not the true gospel. The apostle further warns, “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.” (2 John 1: 9-11)