

Justification by Faith Only

by J.H. Newman

The doctrine of Justification by Faith Only means that Faith is the sole internal instrument of justification, and it does not contradict the doctrine of Works justifying in a different sense.

Scripture: Romans 3:28, Romans 4:5, Galatians 2:16, Ephesians 2:8, James 2:24

Topics: "Justification By Faith", "Sola Fide"

Description

J.H. Newman preaches on the wholesome doctrine that we are justified by faith alone, emphasizing that faith is the sole means and instrument of justification. He clarifies that this does not deny the role of baptism or good works in justification, but rather highlights the distinct senses in which each operates. Newman explains that faith is the impetrating principle that pleads for justification and constitutes our title to it, while also being the beginning of justifying righteousness that will ultimately be fulfilled through divine graces.

Transcript

Article xi. "That we are justified by Faith only, is a most wholesome doctrine."

The Homilies add that Faith is the sole means, the sole instrument of justification. Now, to show briefly what such statements imply, and what they do not.

They do not imply a denial of Baptism as a means or instrument of justification; which the Homilies elsewhere affirm, as will be shown incidentally in a later section.

"The instrumental power of Faith cannot interfere with the instrumental power of Baptism; because Faith is the sole justifier, not in contrast to all means and agencies whatever, (for, it is not surely in contrast to our LORD'S merits, or GOD'S mercy,) but to all other graces. When, then, Faith is called the sole instrument, this means the sole internal instrument, not the sole instrument of any kind.

"There is nothing inconsistent, then, in Faith being the sole instrument of justification, and yet Baptism also the sole instrument, and that at the same time, because in distinct senses; an inward instrument in no way interfering with an outward instrument, Baptism may be the hand of the giver, and Faith the hand of the receiver."

Nor does the sole instrumentality of Faith interfere with the doctrine of Works as a means also. And that it is a means, the Homily of Alms-deeds declares in the strongest language, as will also be quoted in Section

11.

"An assent to the doctrine that Faith alone justifies, does not at all preclude the doctrine of Works justifying also. If, indeed, it were said that Works justify in the same sense as Faith only justifies, this would be a contradiction in terms; but Faith only may justify in one sense--Good Works in another--and this is all that is here maintained. After all does not CHRIST only justify? How is it that the doctrine of Faith justifying does not interfere with our LORD'S being the sole Justifier? It will, of course, be replied, that our LORD is the meritorious cause, and the Faith the means; that Faith justifies in a different and subordinate sense. As, then, CHRIST justifies in the sense in which He justifies alone, yet Faith also justifies in its own sense; so Works, whether moral or ritual, may justify us in their own respective senses, though in the sense in which Faith justifies, it only justifies. The only question is, What is that sense in which Works justify, so as not to interfere with Faith only justifying? It may, indeed, turn out on inquiry, that the sense alleged will not hold, either as being unscriptural, or for any other reason; but, whether so or not, at any rate the apparent inconsistency of language should not startle persons; nor should they so promptly condemn those who, though they do not use their language, use St. James's. Indeed, is not this argument the very weapon of the Arians, in their warfare against the Son of GOD? They said, CHRIST is not GOD, because the FATHER is called the 'Only God.'"

Next we have to inquire in what sense Faith only does justify. In a number of ways, of which here two only shall be mentioned.

First, it is the pleading or impetrating principle, or constitutes our title to justification; being analogous among the graces to Moses' lifting up his hands on the Mount, or the Israelites eyeing the Brazen Serpent,--actions which did not merit GOD'S mercy, but asked for it. A number of means go to effect our justification. We are justified by CHRIST alone, in that He has purchased the gift; by Faith alone, in that Faith asks for it; by Baptism alone, for Baptism conveys it; and by newness of heart alone, for newness of heart is the life of it.

And, secondly, Faith, as being the beginning or perfect or justifying righteousness, is taken for what it tends towards, or ultimately will be. It is said by anticipation to be that which it promises; just as one might pay a labourer his hire before he began his work. Faith working by love is the seed of divine graces, which in due time will be brought forth and flourish--partly in this world, fully in the next.

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