

On Justification (Continued)

by Thomas Reade

The sermon emphasizes the importance of justification by faith alone, and warns against the dangers of emphasizing works in the doctrine of justification.

Scripture: Romans 3:28, Romans 5:1, Romans 8:30, 1 Corinthians 1:30, Galatians 2:16, Ephesians 2:8, Philippians 3:9, Titus 3:5, James 2:17, 1 John 2:6

Topics: "Justification By Faith", "Redemption Through Christ"

Description

Thomas Reade preaches about the doctrine of free justification through faith in the blood of Jesus, emphasizing Martin Luther's powerful application of this Gospel truth against human merit and the Papacy. Luther highlighted the necessity of faith in Christ for redemption and eternal life, while also stressing the importance of good works as a fruit of true faith. The church of England, in alignment with Reformed Churches, upholds justification by faith alone, declaring that we are righteous before God solely through the merit of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul, Luther, and Hooker all affirm that faith in Christ is the only means of justification, leading to peace with God and a new divine life in believers' souls.

Transcript

The doctrine of free justification, through faith in the blood of Jesus, was the Gospel Axe which Luther applied with powerful arm to the root of human merit, whose fibers had struck deeply into the Papal soil. "When I consider," said this champion for the Truth, "the infinite profanation which always has raged in the Church of God, against this only and well-grounded rock, which we hold to be the article of our justification, (that is to say, how not by ourselves, neither by our works, which are less than ourselves, but by another help, even the Son of God, Jesus Christ, we are redeemed from sin, death, and the devil, and are made partakers of eternal life,) I am compelled boldly to speak upon it." And he did speak with a voice of thunder. Through the power of Truth, he made the Papacy tremble. By the light of Truth, he exposed the hidden abominations of the Man of Sin.

Yet, while he declared, that the doctrine of justification by faith without works, is the only Solid Rock, the true test of a standing, or of a falling church; like Paul he was equally anxious for the interests of holiness. He knew the blindness of the natural heart, and its enmity to the truth. He knew also the darkness which remains in the minds of the regenerate, even after they have been enlightened by the Spirit of God.

Hence, he foresaw that diversity of sentiment and statement which would arise in the Church, according to the degrees of light or darkness which each of its members might possess. Under this conviction, he

honestly confessed that, "to teach this doctrine, and at the same time, to insist on the necessity of good works, is a matter of considerable difficulty and danger. For unless the ministers of Christ be wise and faithful dispensers of the divine mysteries, and know how to divide the Word of Truth rightly, the distinct provinces of faith and works will be confounded." Both these provinces should be explained, and impressed on the mind with the greatest diligence, yet in such a manner, that each of them may preserve its proper bounds. Otherwise, if works only are taught, as is the case in the Pope's kingdom, faith is lost. Again, if nothing but faith is inculcated, carnal men soon begin to dream, that there is no need of good works."

Well acquainted with the corruption of the heart, Luther thus guards the Church against the abuse of this vital doctrine- "There is danger on both sides. If the doctrine of faith is not preached, no man can be saved; for it is faith alone that justifies and saves. On the contrary, if faith be preached, as of necessity it must be, the greater part of mankind will interpret the doctrine in a carnal way, and so understand spiritual liberty as to allow indulgences of the flesh. This we may see in all ranks of life, high as well as low. Many make a profession of the Gospel, and boast of Christian liberty, and yet, serving their own lusts and inclinations, they give way to covetousness, pleasure, pride, envy, and such other vices, and none of them does his duty faithfully. It is impossible that people of this description should prove to be governed by the Gospel of peace."

The church of England, in unison with the other Reformed Churches, firmly holds this important branch of the Christian faith. In her eleventh Article she declares- "We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification."

The clear and scriptural language of the Homily referred to, is as follows- "The Apostle touches specially three things, which must go together in our justification. Upon God's part, his great mercy and grace; upon Christ's part, justice, that is, the satisfaction of God's justice, or the price of our redemption by the offering of his body, and shedding of his blood, with fulfilling of the law perfectly and thoroughly; and upon our part, true and lively faith in the merits of Jesus Christ, which yet is not ours, but God's working in its.

"The grace of God does not shut out the justice of God in our justification, but only shuts out the justice of man, that is to say, the justice of our works, as to be merits of deserving our justification. And, therefore, Paul declares here nothing upon the behalf of man, concerning his justification, but only a true and lively faith, which, nevertheless, is the gift of God, and not man's only work without God. And yet, that faith does not shut out repentance, hope, love, dread, and the fear of God, to be joined with faith in every man that is justified, but it shuts them out of the office of justifying. So that, although they be all present together in him who is justified, yet they justify not altogether; neither does faith shut out the justice of our good works, necessarily to be done afterwards of duty towards God, (for we are most bounden to serve God in doing good deeds commanded by him in his Holy Scripture all the days of our life,) but it excludes them so, that we may not do them to this intent, to be made just by doing them."

What language can more fully and explicitly convey to our minds this fundamental truth of the Gospel? May the Eternal Spirit impart unto every reader of these humble pages, if he has it not, this blessed gift of faith, and abundantly increase it, where it has been graciously bestowed.

Hooker breathes the same apostolic language; "Christ has merited righteousness for as many as are found in him. In him God finds us, if we be faithful, for by faith we are incorporated into Christ. Then, although in ourselves we be altogether sinful, yet even the man that is impious in himself, full of iniquity, full of sin, being found in Christ through faith, and having his sin remitted through repentance, him God beholds with a gracious eye, puts away his sin, by not imputing it, takes quite away the punishment due thereunto by pardoning it, and accepts him in Jesus Christ as perfectly righteous, as if he had fulfilled all that was commanded him in the Law. Faith is the only hand which puts on Christ unto justification, and Christ the only garment which, being so put on, covers the shame of our defiled natures, hides the imperfection of our works, preserves us blameless in the sight of God, before whom otherwise the weakness of our faith were cause sufficient to make us culpable, yes, to shut us out from the kingdom of heaven, where nothing that is not absolutely holy can enter."

Such were the views which Luther, the Fathers of the English Church, and Hooker entertained, in perfect accordance with the great Apostle, respecting the all-important doctrine of justification by faith. "The Devil directs his fierce batteries against those doctrines in the Word, and those graces in the heart, which most exalt God, debase man, and bring men to the lowest subjection to their Creator. Such is the doctrine of justifying faith." May this jewel of the Reformation never be covered with the worthless paint of human invention, but ever shine in all our churches with its native luster.

Christ is the enricher of the believing soul. He is the pearl of great price. It is not the hand which receives an offered treasure that makes the receiver rich, but the treasure itself. So neither do works, nor any act of faith justify us, but Christ Himself, whom we apprehend. And this faith, be it weak or strong, is yet able to receive the righteousness of Christ, just as a palsied hand may receive a jewel from a king, as truly, though not so firmly, as the hand which is sound. Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, and receive a new and divine life in our souls.

Peace of conscience, tranquillity of mind, strength to resist sin, delight in holiness, and the hope of glory, are some of 'the precious fruits of faith'. Love accompanies faith, as the light does the sun, and faith working by love evidences our adoption into the family of God, and proves that we are truly born from above. Do we live in the daily enjoyment of this blessedness? Are we sealed by the Spirit of God unto the day of eternal redemption? "The kingdom of grace," as an old writer beautifully observes, "is the suburbs of the kingdom of glory; he therefore who walks not through the suburbs shall never enter into the holy city. A man must be in the kingdom of grace, or else he shall never be admitted into the kingdom of glory. No grace, no glory. No holiness, no happiness. No regeneration, no heaven, nor heavenly honor. For, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God, neither in this world, nor in the world to come. It is then an infallible sign of holiness, when a man does more and more strive against his own unbelief, and labors continually to draw nearer and nearer unto God by holiness.

"To feel our inward corruptions, to desire a deliverance from them, to avoid occasions of sin, to be angry with ourselves for our sinning, is an evidence that the Spirit of God has taken possession of our hearts, and has begun to work a most happy change within us. Where these graces are, there is also the God of grace, the spirit of grace, a man of grace, a true dying unto sin, and a living unto God. Sin is dismounted, the soul is renewed, for God's image is restored."

Thus all who are justified are sanctified, and shall be finally glorified. The renewal of our nature is so essential to happiness, and so indispensably requisite as a preparation for heaven, that without it we cannot be saved. The pure in heart only shall see God; they shall see his face; they shall dwell in his

presence; and reign with him forever and ever.

How bright is the glory which encircles the cross of Christ. There, all the divine perfections meet and harmonize. There, the robe of righteousness is imparted to every believing sinner. With the fullest assurance of hope, the blessed Apostle felt his personal interest in this righteousness of the Redeemer; and could say with unwavering confidence, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Happy Paul! who in the midst of all his sufferings could thus realize his union to Christ by faith.

Are we, like him, crucified with Christ, and become dead to sin and to the world? Does Christ live in us by his Spirit? Are we daily living a life of faith in the Son of God? Can we, with sweet assurance say, "Who loved me, and gave himself for me?" This believing appropriation of the Savior's merits, is the spring of comfort, and the root of holiness.

This blessedness Paul experienced, when Jesus revealed himself in all the fullness of his grace. Under every varying scene of life we also shall partake of this felicity, if with him we can say, "The love of Christ constrains us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead, and that he died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again."

O how peaceful and fruitful is the believer, when daily living under the influence of the constraining love of Christ! It is the love of Christ, felt and enjoyed, which softens the roughness of life, and smooths the ruggedness of the way to glory. Sin produces thorns which pierce the heart with many sorrows. But Jesus, by removing the evil, fills the soul with gladness. When he gives quietness, who then can make trouble? As the heart knows its own bitterness, so a stranger does not intermeddle with its joy.

How humbling is the language, how self-abasing are the feelings of the believing sinner, when contemplating these wonders of redeeming love. Methinks I hear such a one thus pouring out his heart in secret- I am indeed a guilty, corrupt, and ruined creature, unable to appease a justly offended God, or make the least atonement for my violations of his law. I am in myself helpless and hopeless. Ah! where then, shall I turn my eyes for support? Can any of my fellow-mortals deliver me out of the wretched condition into which I am plunged, through my original and actual transgression? They are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable; there is none that does good, no not one.

Shall I turn my eyes toward the angelic host, and crave the assistance of the highest seraphim? It is hopeless expectation. I have sinned against an infinite God, who demanded an infinite satisfaction. They are creatures like myself, and have nothing infinite to offer.

To whom then must I look? May I for a moment hope, that the infinite God before whom the angels veil their faces, will condescend to save me from merited destruction, by giving the required satisfaction to his own adorable perfections? But how can God, who is a spirit, make atonement for my sins, since he has declared, "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." Will the eternal Jehovah stoop so low, as to take upon him my nature, and suffer in my stead? Will He become a son of man, that I may be made a child of God?- "Hear, O heavens! give ear O earth! for the Lord has done it."

Such condescending mercy could never have been conceived by men or angels, had not God himself revealed this mystery of love in the volume of his grace. His own arm has brought salvation. He has visited

and redeemed his people. He has magnified the Law, and made it honorable. He is become the Lord Our Righteousness; the justifier of the ungodly. O wonder of wonders!

"Not to be thought on, but with tides of joy,

Not to be mentioned, but with shouts of praise."

O rich salvation of mercy! "In the beginning the Word already existed. He was with God, and he was God. So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father. Jesus, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. He took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham. He was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death; and, being the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had, by himself purged our sins, he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, being so much better than the angels, as he had by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. Therefore God has highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and things that are under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Almighty God, enable me, through the mighty power of your Holy Spirit, to believe in Jesus; to love him with all my heart; to trust in him as my atoning sacrifice, my justifying righteousness; my purifying fountain, my hope of glory. Give me a growing delight in your holy Word, which reveals these riches of your grace to sinners. May I prize it as my greatest treasure, and study it as my highest wisdom. Impart, to me the spirit of illumination to understand its truths, and to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that I may be filled with all the fullness of God. Give me more and more of your quickening grace; stir up my languid affections, subdue my inward corruptions, and enable me to persevere in the ways of holiness, until death is swallowed up in victory; and grace is ripened into glory.

"Great God, when I approach your throne,

And all your glory see;

This is my stay, and this alone,

That Jesus died for me.

How can a soul condemned to die

Escape the just decree?

A vile, unworthy wretch am I,

But Jesus died for me.

Burdened with sin's oppressive chain,

O how can I get free?
No peace can all my efforts gain,
But Jesus died for me.
My course I could not safely steer
Through life's tempestuous sea;
Did not this truth relieve my fear,
That Jesus died for me.
And Lord, when I behold your face,
This must be all my plea;
Save me by your almighty grace,
For Jesus died for me."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/thomas-reade/on-justification-continued/>

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