

Paul's Doctrine on Justification by Faith.

by Thomas Reade

The sermon emphasizes the importance of justification by faith, highlighting the role of faith in receiving the righteousness of Christ and the relationship between faith and works.

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

Description

Thomas Reade preaches about the doctrine of justification by faith through the righteousness of Jesus Christ, emphasizing its distinction from human schemes of salvation. This doctrine aims to humble sinners, exalt the Savior, and promote holiness, founded on the Fall of Man and the Justice of God. Paul, inspired by God, proclaimed the heavenly truths of Christ as the Mediator, Ransom, Righteousness, and Refuge for all. The Apostle Paul, fully weaned from self, asserted that man is justified by faith in Jesus Christ, not by works of the law, acknowledging the need for complete reliance on Christ for salvation.

Transcript

The doctrine of justification by faith, through the righteousness of Jesus Christ, is the grand characteristic of the Gospel, which distinguishes it from all 'human' schemes of salvation. It is the revelation and work of God himself. Its design is- to humble the sinner, to exalt the Savior, and to promote holiness. This doctrine is founded on the Fall of Man, and on the Justice of God; for while God demands a sinless obedience to his holy Law, man is utterly unable to satisfy the least of its righteous claims.

Through the Fall, we lost the image of God, and all power to serve him aright. Being destitute of every holy principle, and enslaved by every evil passion, we can neither atone for past transgressions, nor perform one act of acceptable obedience.

Foreseeing our wretched state, through original and actual sin; a God of love has provided a RANSOM, a RIGHTEOUSNESS and a REFUGE for us. Paul was honored of God to proclaim these heavenly truths- "There is one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a RANSOM for all, to be testified in due time." "Of Him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us RIGHTEOUSNESS." "We have strong consolation, who have fled for REFUGE to lay hold upon the hope set before us." O that our hearts could expand with faith and hope, then, with the Apostle we should delight to dwell upon this exhaustless theme, and with feelings of the liveliest joy, should thank our God for his Unspeakable Gift.

Being taught by the Spirit to know himself as a sinner, this enlightened Apostle had learned to value Christ as a Savior. Wholly weaned from self, this heart was fixed upon Christ, the true foundation. With uncompromising firmness he could therefore assert, "A man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ; even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

This glorious truth of the Gospel, so opposed to all his ancient views and feelings, he saw with a distinctness which no carnal reasoning could obscure. Beholding by the light of Revelation, the wide extent of Adam's transgression, he could unite with David in declaring. "There is none righteous, no not one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks after God; they are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that does good- no not one." Hence the Apostle was led to this humbling confession; "The law has concluded all under sin, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God."

Hearing the voice of justice in all its awfulness, with Job he abhorred himself in dust and ashes. Hearing the voice of mercy speaking peace through the blood of Jesus, with Mary he rejoiced in God his Savior.

Full of grateful love, he went forth into all lands, to make known these unsearchable riches of Christ- that Jesus is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believes- that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us- that all who believe, are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified, by the Law of Moses- that, the righteousness of God, which is by faith in Jesus Christ, is unto all, and upon all those who believe, for there is no difference; for the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on him shall not be ashamed'- that, there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all who call upon him; for whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Knowing these statements to be the Truth of God, and knowing also the legality of the natural heart and its enmity to the doctrines of grace, he boldly asks the self-righteous opposer, "Do we then make void the Law through faith?" Do we lessen the sanctions, or lower the standard of a Law so holy in its nature, so just in its requirements, so good in its tendencies? "God forbid- yes, we establish the law;" -we maintain its unalterable holiness, its inflexible justice, its irreconcilableness to the smallest transgression.

Through the light of the Holy Spirit, he saw with an inspired clearness of perception, that no sinner can be saved by any obedience of his own; since, "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags," unable to screen us from the wrath of God, who has declared, "the soul that sins it, shall die." He therefore fled to Christ for refuge; found shelter under the covering of his perfect righteousness, and rejoiced in hope of the glory of God.

This fundamental doctrine of the Gospel, so destructive to pride and self-sufficiency, this divinely taught Apostle found to be the very source of consolation, strength, and hope.

Having given the church at Philippi a catalogue of those things which once constituted his Pharisaical treasure, he makes the noble declaration, "I once thought all these things were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I may have Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own goodness or my ability to obey God's law, but I trust Christ to save me. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. As a result, I can really know Christ and experience the mighty power

that raised him from the dead. I can learn what it means to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that, somehow, I can experience the resurrection from the dead!"

Then, with his usual humility and self-abasement, he acknowledges his need of still increasing supplies of spiritual blessings; "I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be. No, dear friends, I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven."

If the Apostle, than whom perhaps no saint was ever more holy, thus confessed his shortcomings; if he regarded his attainments as nothing, when compared with what remained to be attained; if all his hopes of heaven were reposed upon the finished work of his beloved Savior; how humble, how dependent ought we to be, who stand at so great a distance from the honored servant of Christ!

Yet how encouraging is the view of his character and experience. He, who converted Saul of Tarsus, can now change the heart of the hardest sinner! Let none then despair of mercy, who feel a longing desire after salvation.

"Let not conscience make you linger;

Nor of fitness fondly dream;

All the fitness he requires,

Is to feel your need of him;

This he gives you;

'Tis the Spirit's rising beam."

The "offence of the cross" has not yet ceased, nor ever will, so long as pride bears its sway in our hearts. We cannot part with the fond conceit which we naturally have of our own works. If Christ must be our justifier, we hope, at least, to have some share in the meritorious act of justifying. We cannot brook the thought of being wholly indebted to another.

Owing to this proud attachment to our supposed goodness, much error exists in the Christian world. The great doctrine of justification by faith only, cannot, therefore, be too clearly and scripturally stated. How many, even in this our day, darken counsel by words without knowledge. They are blind guides, groping, as in the dark, amid the full blaze of Gospel, light. With all humility of mind, and earnest prayer, we should seek for light to discover the Truth, and for a heart to embrace it when discovered.

Let us then consider in what way a sinner is justified in the sight of God, that we may rightly apprehend and thankfully embrace, through the Spirit, this inestimable blessing.

1. We are justified MERITORIOUSLY, through the righteousness of Jesus Christ, who became obedient unto the Law for man; and who, while we were yet sinners, died for us, that being justified by his blood, we might be saved from wrath through Him.

2. We are justified INSTRUMENTALLY, by faith alone, which is the gift of God, the hand that receives the blessed Jesus, and puts him on with all his saving merits, as the robe of righteousness, the garment of salvation.

3. We are justified DECLARATIVELY by good works, which are the fruits of faith, and evidence our union to Jesus Christ as living branches in the true vine.

Every blessing flows from the throne of mercy through Jesus Christ, who is the only medium of communication between earth and heaven; while all our services ascend with acceptance, only as they are covered with his infinite merits, and washed from their pollution through his precious blood.

Jesus is the Lord Our Righteousness; he is made unto us righteousness; and we are made the righteousness of God in him. Hence God can be just, and yet the justifier of all who believe in Jesus. The way of access is now opened. In Christ, we have boldness and access with confidence, to the Father of mercies; and obtain, through faith in his blood, a right and title to the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. Thus we are made complete in Him, and the kingdom of heaven is opened to all believers. It must, however, never be forgotten, that there is nothing meritorious in faith. Faith is a grace, wrought in the heart of the sinner, through the power of the Holy Spirit, whereby he apprehends Christ, and is made an heir of God, through Him.

We have nothing whereof to glory, being "justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." The language of our heart must ever be, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to your name give glory, for your mercy, and for your truth's sake."

As faith is the gift of God, and the root of holiness, so works which do not spring from faith, cannot be acceptable to God; because, without faith it is impossible to please him.

By nature, our hearts yield nothing but evil fruit, and this evil produce continues, until we are united to Christ by faith. When grafted by the Spirit, into Jesus the living vine, we receive a new nature, and bring forth new fruit, in all goodness, righteousness, and truth. This good fruit manifests itself by holy obedience to the will of God; it is declarative of our interest in the righteousness of Christ through faith, and prepares us for the enjoyment of heaven.

From this scriptural view of a sinner's acceptance with God, it is evident, that we cannot be justified without faith; and yet, we must not look to our faith as that which justifies us. Our eye must be fixed on the righteousness of Christ only. When our acts of faith are the strongest, we must not rely upon them, as yielding any merit, or as recommending us to God. Our language must then be; I have believed in Christ, and God has justified me; but I will not believe, that God has pardoned me for my faith; I know that I must trust in Christ, if I am accepted of my Judge; therefore I will banish forever, all thoughts of my being pleasing to God, for the sake of my act of believing.

Whoever steers this course will provide for his present comfort, and future safety; for it is only men's ignorance of themselves, of the Law, and of the essential righteousness of God, that puts them upon trusting in anything they can do for their justification before God, and hinders them from submitting to the righteousness of Christ.

Faith resigns up the soul to the mercies of God, and the infinite merits of Christ, and has no confidence in the flesh; it brings the sinner to look on all things as nothing, and not fit to be joined to Christ, who is the

only foundation for his reliance; and then his care is, how to be found in the righteousness of Christ, and to place the crown of glory on the head of his Redeemer. This was the experience of Paul, who counted all things but loss for Christ, desiring only that he might be found in Him.

If the doctrine of justification by faith were therefore rightly apprehended, as set forth by the great Apostle under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it would prevent that unscriptural mixture of faith and works, as the ground of our acceptance with God, which destroys its nature, tarnishes its glory, and endangers our salvation.

"O how unlike the complex works of man,

Heaven's easy, artless, unencumbered plan.

Its stand like the cerulean arch we see,

Majestic in its own simplicity.

Inscribed above the portal from afar

Conspicuous as the brightness of a star.

Legible only by the light they give,

Stand the soul-quickening words- Believe and live!

Too many shocked at what should charm them most,

Despise the plain direction and are lost."

Although Paul was the champion for this glorious doctrine of justification through faith, yet with equal ardor he enforced the necessity of holiness on the hearts and consciences of believers.

As those who preach the Gospel with faithfulness, should exemplify its excellence by their superior sanctity, the apostle exhorted Titus to the practice of universal holiness- "Speak the things which become sound doctrine; in all things showing yourself a pattern of good works."

Equally comprehensive was his charge to this young minister of the Gospel, whom he called his son after the common faith- "These things I have told you are all true. I want you to insist on them so that everyone who trusts in God will be careful to do good deeds all the time. These things are good and beneficial for everyone." "Put them in mind to be ready to every good work."

This faithful pastor over the Lord's flock closed his Epistle with a general admonition both to ministers and people, who professed an attachment to the Gospel of Christ- "Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives." So decided were his views respecting the nature and necessity of sanctification, that, in perfect accordance with the doctrine of grace, he declared- "For when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, it makes no difference to God whether we are circumcised or not circumcised. What is important is faith expressing itself in love. For it makes no difference whether or not a man has been circumcised. The important thing is to keep God's commandments." "For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should

live in this evil world with self-control, right conduct, and devotion to God, while we look forward to that wonderful event when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed. He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing what is right."

With these earnest desires for the fruitfulness of believers be prayed in behalf of the Hebrew converts, "May the God of peace, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever."

Some people, who are opposed to the doctrine of free justification, endeavor to set James in array against his brother Apostle, as if he were anxious to counteract Paul's statements, and to disprove his conclusions. If they will study the Epistles of Paul and James, with simplicity and prayer, they will soon find that there is neither antinomianism in the one, nor any ground for legality in the other- but that the Apostles are in perfect agreement with each other. Like the radii of a circle, they meet in one common center. They both select the case of Abraham. Paul says; "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." James says; "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness;" each quoting the words of Moses, "He believed God, and he counted it to him for righteousness."

Thus they conjointly build on the same foundation, that is, that Abraham was justified by faith. Where then is the difference of their statements? It arises from the abuse which was made of this divine truth. Paul declared, that all works, whether ceremonial or moral, are excluded from the office of justifying the sinner in the sight of God; that we are justified freely by his grace, as the source, and by the blood of Christ, as the meritoriously procuring cause.

But this blessed doctrine, so full of comfort to the broken-hearted penitent, was soon perverted by men of corrupt minds, destitute of the truth. They slanderously affirmed, that Paul had said- "Let us do evil that good may come;" -and hence, they took occasion to sin, on the impious principle that grace might abound. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, expresses his abhorrence of such vile inferences, drawn from his preaching; and strenuously enforces the necessity of good works. James, with equal force, levels his Epistle, not against the holy doctrine preached by Paul, but against those abusers of divine grace, who, under pretense of exalting Christ, only wanted a license to sin. So early did Satan labor to bring an odium upon the Gospel, by the unholy lives of hypocritical professors.

To counteract this evil, James declares that the faith which justifies is a working faith- that as kind words, and good wishes will not feed a starving brother, while unaccompanied with the needful supply, so neither will faith profit us, if it has not works; for as the body, without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also; that by works, faith is made perfect; and therefore, that such a barren faith, as these corrupters of the truth propagated, could never save the soul; since by works a man is justified, or declared to be in a state of justification, and not by faith alone, (that is, a faith unproductive of good works).

The sum of the matter then is this; What God has joined, none must divide; and what God has divided, none must join. He has separated faith and works in the business of justification, according to Paul, and none must join them in it. He has joined them in the lives of justified people, as James speaks, and, there we must not separate them. Paul assures us, that works have not a co-efficiency in justification itself; but James assures us, that they may and must have a co-existancy in those who are justified.

It is evident, therefore, from the scriptures of Truth, that neither faith nor works can procure our admission into the heavenly temple. Christ, as our Great High Priest, can alone enter by his own blood into the Holy

Place. In heaven he sits as a priest upon his throne, and there, appearing in the presence of God for us, his living care will perfect, what his dying love began. Through him then we must approach the mercy-seat; by him we must enter into the celestial city. O! how precious is our Almighty Savior. To him we must look- on him we must depend- from him we must draw every needful blessing. His name is as ointment poured forth. He is the balm of Gilead and physician there.

O that our hearts may ever be in tune, to sing the praises of the Lamb who was slain, and has redeemed us unto God by his blood, until we join the universal chorus in the world above, and crown him Lord of all!

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