

4. Justification by Faith Alone (4Q 2011—Galatians)

Biblical material: Gal. 2:15–21; Eph. 2:12; Phil. 3:9; Rom. 3:10–20; Gen. 15:5, 6; Rom. 3:8.

Quotes

- God is a just God, and the justification of the sinner must be accomplished in perfect harmony with God’s justice. *Wil Pounds*
- Justification by faith alone. The Article by which the Church stands or falls. *Gerhard Forde*
- It is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us... *Martin Luther*
- If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema. *Council of Trent*
- An explanation of cause is not a justification by reason. *C.S. Lewis*
- Faith is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted in spite of your changing moods. *C.S. Lewis*

Questions

Why is the phrase “justification by faith” so important? What does it really mean? Why does Paul make such an issue of it here? What is he combating? How are we “set right” by God? What is the danger if we get such ideas wrong? How can “justification” itself end up being legalistic? What’s wrong with saying, “Just have faith”?

Bible summary

The essential phrase here is Gal. 2:16 (FBV): “we know that no-one is made right by doing what the law demands but through trusting in Jesus Christ. We believed in Christ Jesus so that we could be made right by trusting in Christ and not through doing what the law says—because nobody is made right by observing the requirements of the law.” That is justification by faith. As the chapter explains, the fact that we fail and are flawed does not negate this wonderful gospel truth!

Before we were “without hope and without God in the world,” (Eph. 2:12 NIV), but now, “I want to be found in him, not being right because of what I’ve done, or what the law requires, but made right through confidence in Christ, set right by God through trusting in him.” (Phil. 3:9 FBV). We have no righteousness of ourselves (Rom. 3:10-20). Gen. 15:5, 6 talks about God “counting” Abraham as righteous—not saying something that was not true, but looking in potentiality and the end result of trusting God. This is no “license to sin” (Rom. 3:8); our dedication to God includes identifying with him that right is right and wrong is wrong!

Comment

The title for this lesson is an interesting one. It is Luther’s translation of Romans 3:28, “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith alone apart from observing the law.” The word “alone” does not appear in the Greek, and it was added by Luther. When

he was challenged about this addition, Luther replied, “If your Papist annoys you with the word (‘alone’), tell him straightway, Dr. Martin Luther will have it so: Papist and ass are one and the same thing. Whoever will not have my translation, let him give it the go-by: the devil’s thanks to him who censures it without my will and knowledge. Luther will have it so, and he is a doctor above all the doctors in Popedom.”

Of course, Luther was trying to counter the prevailing Catholic notion of “justification plus,” in which works were an essential ingredient to justification. But this points us to the need for a clear understanding of what Paul means. Interestingly Ellen White never uses the phrase “justification by faith alone.”

We need to “unpack” the phrase “justification by faith.” Justification” is the Latin-based word for “making or setting right.” “Faith” is trusting God. So a more understandable translation is “set right by trusting in God.” And that is really what it is all about. The long words tend to get in the way...

Comment 2

Jesus never used the term *justification*. Certainly not in the sense that so many people seem to use it today, implying that what is needed is some *legal machination* needed by God before he can save us. Things were much simpler then—certainly the words that came from the lips of Jesus:

“Christ came to preach the gospel to the poor. He reached the people where they were. He brought plain, simple truth to their comprehension. How simple His language! Even the poorest, the unlearned and ignorant, could understand Him. *Not one needed to go to a dictionary to obtain the meaning of the high-sounding titles or words that fell from the lips of the greatest Teacher the world ever knew.*” (Ellen White, Review and Herald, July 19, 1887. Italics mine.)

When Jesus spoke of what was needed, he spoke about *healing*. He demonstrated what he meant by many miracles of physical healing, the restoration of complete health. And that is God’s intention in the spiritual realm: complete spiritual healing. In this, the emphasis is not on *legal adjustment* but on *divine cure*.

Which is why Jesus came. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19)—and not the other way around! “Angels could not fully portray the character of God, but Christ, who was a living impersonation of God, could not fail to accomplish the work. The only way in which he could *set and keep men right* was to make himself visible and familiar to their eyes.” “Christ exalted the character of God, attributing to him the praise, and giving to him the credit, of the whole purpose of his own mission on earth,--*to set men right through the revelation of God.*” (Ellen White, Signs of the Times, January 20, 1890. My emphasis).

Simple words! To set us right and to keep us right—through the revelation of God. Not said in a complicated way, but in the simplest language....

Ellen White Comments

Angels could not fully portray the character of God, but Christ, who was a living impersonation of God, could not fail to accomplish the work. The only way in which he could set and keep men right was to make himself visible and familiar to their eyes. That men might have salvation he came directly to man, and became a partaker of his nature.

{ST, January 20, 1890}

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