

Justification by Faith

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Article 46 of 47 **Short Meditations**

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In the dispensation of His grace, God provides the sinner with an answer to His own demands upon him. He gives him security in the day of the judgment of righteousness. For He judges sin. Surely He cannot pass it by. Righteousness calls for the judgment of it. But He, in grace, provides the sinner with an answer and a shelter: and it becomes the duty and the obedience of a sinner, to use this shelter — and this using of God's provision, is faith.

The Lord, in this way, provided Noah with an answer to His own righteous and purposed judgment that was coming on the world before the Flood. "Make thee an ark of gopher-wood," said God to him. Noah did so, believing the word both of judgment and of deliverance, and he was safe.

He provided Israel in Egypt, against another day of judgment. Israel used this provision, putting the blood upon the lintel, and was sheltered from the sword of the Angel.

In like manner, He made provision for Rahab in the day of the judgment of Canaan, as He had made provision for Israel in the day of the judgment of Egypt; and she escaped, just because she received the word by faith, and used God's provisions, hanging the scarlet line out from the window. — And thus is it still.

There are two things now under judgment, as once the antediluvian world was under judgment, and then Egypt, and then Canaan. Man, and the world, are both of them marked for judgment. But God has provided a refuge for man the sinner. The Gospel is that which reveals it. The sacrifice of His own Lamb is an answer to all His demands in righteousness against the sinner, and God Himself has given that Lamb, and accepted that sacrifice. Faith accepts this gift. By faith the sinner pleads that answer, and is saved.

What a simple, wondrous method! what riches of grace! Nothing, as we thus see, enters into God's way in grace, but faith. It is, therefore, the obedience of faith, which is now demanded. (Rom. 1: 5) And when the Lord was asked by some, "What shall we do that we may work the works of God?" He answered, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." (John 6)

The excellency of this principle of faith, its wondrous working, and its high esteem with God, might be shown by the testimony of Scripture from beginning to end. All gives way before it. Even a state of *innocency* at the beginning had to yield up the place, to a state of faith. (Gen. 3) *Judgment* is met and averted by it, as we have seen. *Law* is set aside to let it in. And love itself will not be accepted of God instead of it. Faith is established as the link between God and us.

But this being so, this being fixed and settled, it is blessed to be taught, as we axe in Romans 1 - 5, the moral glories which are to be discovered in this precious doctrine of faith. Thankfully indeed ought we to ponder such Divine instruction.

This doctrine, we there see and know, *exposes and humbles* man thoroughly. It assumes that we are dead in sins, left incurably, irrecoverably ruined by ourselves, and under the law. But then, it also *assures* us and *dignifies* us. It gives the believing sinner the clear, sure title to return to God; and when returned, it tells him of the dignities and joys, the honours and the privileges, which await him in that

wealthy, blessed place.

And beside. It is perfect in what it *denies* us, as well as in what it *confers* on us. It excludes "boasting" from us, while it makes us "the righteousness of God," and "children," and gives us peace and grace and joy, eternal interest in the past death of Christ and in His present life, and in His coming glory, of which it now gives the sure hope, with possession of the love of God in its measureless fulness.

These things are what this doctrine of faith does for *us* — as we learn from these wondrous chapters, Romans 1 - 5. And what can be more blessed than this principle of faith, and justification by it, when it secures to the sinner such conditions and results as these?

Then as to God. — It is that which *displays* Him, and thus *glorifies* Him beyond every thing. That marvellous mystery, which is called the Gospel, God's good news, presents God to His whole creation in the highest forms of moral glory. It shows Him in the fulness of combined grace and righteousness, as just and yet a Justifier. It puts Him as the doer of all the work, and the inheritor of all the glory. It also puts Him alike before all men, Jews and Gentiles. "Is He the God of the Jews only?" it asks; and it answers, "Nay, but of the Gentiles also."

These are blessed consequences of this doctrine or principle of faith, as it respects God.

And further, as these chapters also let us learn — *It establishes law*. This is another fine fruit and consequence of the doctrine of faith. For the Gospel (and it is with the Gospel faith has to do) exhibits the Law as magnified and made honourable, the full penalty of the breach of it having been sustained by Him whom the Gospel preaches to us.

Surely we may then say, Well may that great, Divine Epistle open by saying, that it is the obedience of *faith* which is now demanded of all men by God, for the glory of His own name.

In the Epistle of the same Apostle to the Galatians, he lets us perceive, as in his own person, that "justification by faith," which he is there defending, is no mere dogma, or proposition which may exercise the intellect, or give a theme to the mind to discuss, as in the schools. He lets us know, that he himself had proved it to be a truth full of life and power.

And there is this difference, among others, between. these two Epistles. In the Romans we get this doctrine propounded in its moral glory, insisted on, taught and proved, with its bearings on the glory of God, and on the condition of the believing sinner — as we have seen. In the Galatians, the Apostle shows *himself* to us in connection with this doctrine. He *lives* it, rather than teaches or proves it — though he does that also. He is defending it against gainsayers, and not simply propounding it to sinners — and in fervency of spirit, he is led forth of God, to tell us how this doctrine, this principle of faith, illustrated its virtue in his own person, and that too, in varied relationships, as towards the creatures around him, as towards gainsayers, as in God's own presence, and as in connection with this present evil world.

As towards *the creature*, that blessed, personal, immediate possession of God, which this doctrine or principle of faith had given him, made him independent. He could go down to Arabia. He could turn his back on Jerusalem and all that was there to countenance and refresh him, and look to the solitudes of the desert. (Gal. 1)

As towards *gainsayers*, it made him as bold as a lion, not intimidated even by the presence of a Peter, who, at that moment, more than any other man, had all title in the flesh. (Gal. 2)

As *in God's presence*, it made him free and happy, breathing there the spirit of adoption, and

knowing the liberty of one accepted as in the Beloved. (Gal. 4)

As in connection with this present evil world, it gave him victory over it. He was crucified to it, and it to him. (Gal. 6)

These are some of the reflections of the doctrine of Divine righteousness, or justification by faith, in the soul of this dear Apostle. It was no more intellectual possession of a dogma that could do these things for the soul. This doctrine implies restoration to God, personal, immediate restoration. Adam, through sin, lost Him; the sinner, through faith, recovers Him. It is the spring of hope and of love — as he tells us in this same Epistle. (Gal. 5: 5, 6.) It is no mere scholastic proposition. Justification by faith is the religion of a sinner in personal, immediate confidence in God.

In this same Epistle, the Apostle under the Holy Ghost, protects this truth against all trespassers, be they as august and full of authority as you please; whether, as I may say, chief in *creation* like Angels, chief in *office*, like Apostles, or chief in *the ways of God*, as the Law. (Gal. 1: 8; Gal. 2: 11-21; Gal. 4: 19-31) Angels must stand accursed, if they would gainsay this truth. Peter shall be withstood to the face without sparing him, if he cloud it. The Law, which was God's own voice in its time and place, must be silent when this truth proclaims itself.

This truth, the Gospel of God, brings a message to me about myself, I would here add, as well as about God. It tells me of sin as well as of salvation. It tells me that the whole world is in a state of revolt and rebellion, and that I myself am a self-ruined sinner. If I receive such a message as that, conviction, and affections which accompany conviction, will be awakened in me. As naturally will the soul be occupied with them, as with the peace and assurance and joy which the message of salvation will inspire. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," was said to a *startled* sinner. The Samaritan was convicted by the Lord as a sinner, ere He revealed Himself to her as a Saviour. The Gospel speaks of judgment and of peace — but it lays judgment at the door of *all*, peace on the conscience of those who are *awakened*.

Justification by faith is never treated as a mere scholastic proposition. Indeed it is not. It is the religion of a convicted sinner's personal, immediate confidence in God, and that, too, enjoyed on a title which God Himself has, as it were, written out for him. We may see the wealth of that place, to which (according to this same Epistle to the Galatians) it brings the sinner. It brings him into the family of God, making him a child. It brings him into the hope or prospect of glory as his inheritance. And there, in these wealthy places, it teaches him to breathe the air of freedom and of love. (Gal. 3: 26; Gal. 5: 1, 5, 6.)

The moral grandeur of this dogma (for we may call it so) is in every way wonderful. Justification by faith is infinitely distant from merely leaving us as delivered from judgment, or escaped from the curse. Nor is it the being brought back to God in doubt and fear. It is a *full* return to Him, a return *the whole way*, restoration to more than the goodly estate which Adam by transgression lost, a state of ease and unsuspecting assurance. It would not be redemption, if it did not give us the state in all its rich qualities, which we lost by sin. It gives us more than that, I know. But it must give us that, at the least, to be what it is, redemption. This has been observed by others long since; and it must be so.

Faith puts the soul near and with God. It makes God Himself the great circumstance in our condition. To give up the religion of faith is to remove from God. Intermediate things disappear, all that interfered has been dismissed, when faith enters. The same Epistle teaches these things. (Gal. 1: 6; Gal. 3: 25; Gal. 4: 9.)

And further. In treating this great dogma, the Apostle shows us, how it secures the claims of

holiness.

He teaches, that redemption from the Law is only by the death of Christ; and that we have no title to deliver ourselves from that old husband, except by union with Him that is raised from the dead, the new husband; and by this union, fruit is brought forth to God. This is the religion of faith, and it is, in this manner, the source and the security of holiness. (Rom. 7)

So again, in the Galatians. The same Apostle teaches, that the hearing of faith was the receiving of the Spirit; and a walking in the Spirit is a not fulfilling of the lusts of the flesh. (Gal. 3: 1-5; Gal. 5: 16-18.)