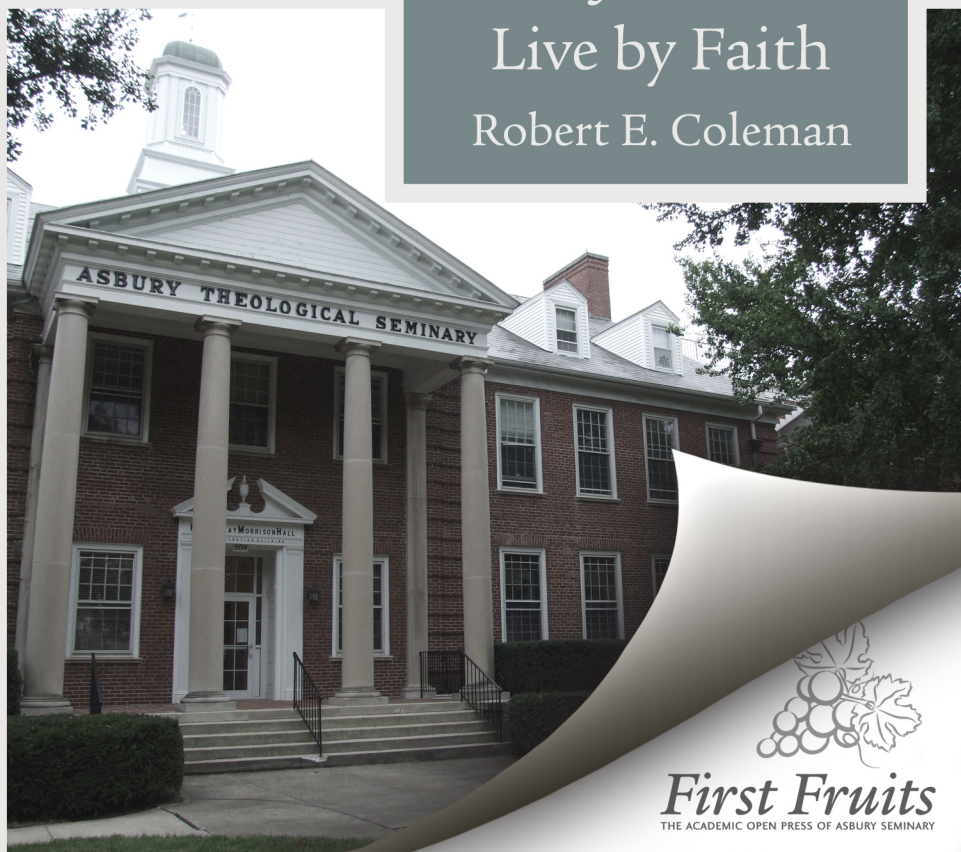


ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY **90TH** ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL EDITION  
—1923-2013—

Justification:  
The Just Shall  
Live by Faith  
Robert E. Coleman



*First Fruits*  
THE ACADEMIC OPEN PRESS OF ASBURY SEMINARY

DOI: 10.7252/Paper.00008

Justification: The Just Shall Live by Faith  
By Robert E. Coleman

Digital version at  
<http://place.asburyseminary.edu/firstfruitspapers/11/>

First Fruits Press is a digital imprint of the Asbury Theological Seminary, B.L. Fisher Library. Asbury Theological Seminary reserves the right to release new editions of this material as well as new material produced by Asbury Theological Seminary. Its publications are available for noncommercial and educational uses, such as research, teaching and private study. First Fruits Press has licensed the digital version of this work under the Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial 3.0 United States License. To view a copy of this <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/us/>.

Questions, contact:

First Fruits Press  
B.L. Fisher Library  
Asbury Theological Seminary  
204 N. Lexington Ave.  
Wilmore, KY 40390  
<http://place.asburyseminary.edu/firstfruits>

Cover Design by Kelli Dierdorf



[asburyseminary.edu](http://asburyseminary.edu)  
800.2ASBURY  
204 North Lexington Avenue  
Wilmore, Kentucky 40390



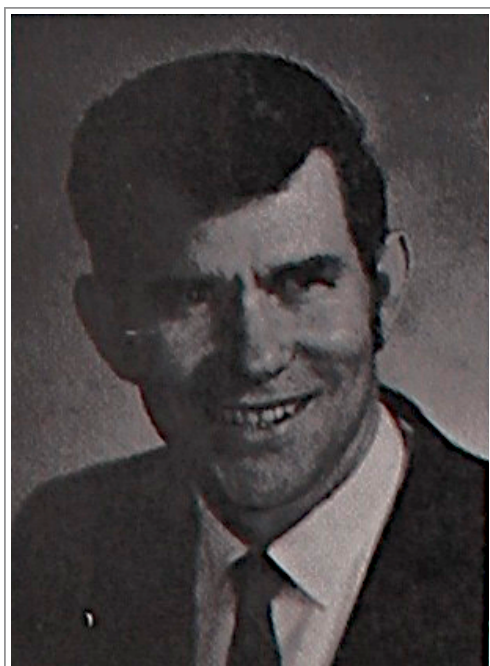
# Justification

---

## **The Just Shall Live by Faith**

*Robert E. Coleman*

November 20, 1973



Unless we can speak a definitive word here, however relevant we may seem in other areas, we have nothing to say that can meet man's ultimate need.

- 1) The Heart of the Gospel – Justification concerns man's relationship to God. When interpreted in its' larger dimension of grace, faith and personal holiness, it lies at the heart of the Gospel.

The term itself normally has a forensic reference in scripture, indicating that God by His own sovereign will forgives our sin for the sake of His Son. "Imputation" and "reckoning" explain the way the merit and character of Christ is ascribed to the believer—"Reconciliation" focuses upon bringing together two parties that were once separated. The word "redemption" means to buy back and to loosen the bonds of a prisoner setting him free.

- 2) Relation to the Atonement – Running through all these terms is the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He died in our place, not only as our example, but as our sin bearer. Interpretations of the atonement vary, but at its heart is the objective fact that Calvary covers it all.
- 3) New Life in Christ – More than a change of relationship is ours in Christ. Men dead in sin not only die with Christ on the cross, but are raised in the power of His resurrection to walk in newness of life. With justification comes regeneration of the human personality and adoption into the family of God. There is an actual transformation of the inner man through the impartation of the Holy Spirit. In this experience there is joyous assurance even as there is continuous growth in the realization of God's perfect will.
- 4) Grace and Faith – All who believe in Jesus Christ have title to this life now, for it is completely a gift

of God. Such faith, of course, is accompanied by repentance, which means a change of mind and purpose. In turn, grace in the heart brings forth good works to the praise of God. Roman Catholic, Calvinistic, and Arminian views at this point are considered.

- 5) A Living Example – The relationship between justifying faith and personal righteousness can be seen vividly in the experience of John Wesley.
- 6) Always Contemporary – What Wesley discovered at Aldersgate is always contemporary. How it happens is not important. But the personal reality of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ is God’s design for every man.

When the titles for these scholarly papers were publicized, an alumnus of the Seminary expressed apprehension at the selection of subjects. He felt that the treatment of classical doctrines would be dismissed by the contemporary Christian world as “obscurantist.” There was sincere concern that we come to grips with the real hurts of the world and the church, and not just run the old “clichés through the grinder again.”

This astute minister makes a point, which we dare not ignore. Our Lord does not permit us the luxury of talking to ourselves in the cloistered retreat of an ivory tower while all around us the world goes up in flame. Nor will our despairing society excuse such academic immunity in the face of their burning woes. We are expected to be in the arena where people live and die.

But is this removed from the recurring task of clarifying our historic faith? Indeed, in this confused age of relativity, what is more needed than a sure basis for human redemption—in this world and in the world to come? If we can not speak a definitive word here, however relevant we may seem in other

areas, we have nothing to say that can resolve man's ultimate problem.

### **The Heart of the Gospel**

Crucial to the whole discussion of salvation is the doctrine of justification, or to put it in the Reformation motif—*"sola fide,"* justification by faith alone. Contained in its truth is the basic issue of man's state before God. When interpreted in the larger dimension of grace, faith, and personal holiness, it lies at the heart of the Gospel. Luther called it "the principle article of all Christian doctrine, which maketh true Christians indeed."<sup>1</sup>

As used in Scripture, the words "justify" and "justification" normally have a forensic reference, closely related to the idea of trial and judgment (Deuteronomy 25:1; 1 Kings 8:32; Matthew 12:37; Romans 3:4; 1 Corinthians 4:3). That is, one is justified when the demands of the law have been fully satisfied.

But how could this ever apply to man? None of us is inherently righteous. We have all turned to our own way, transgressing the moral requirements of the holy law. Individually and corporately the whole human race has come under the just condemnation of sin and death. Obviously from any standpoint of merit or innocence, man cannot be justified before God.

Only then in the Gospel sense of pardon can this term apply to sinners. God simply by His own sovereign will forgives our sin for the sake of His Son who loved us unto death. In this figure, Christ is seen as the One altogether lovely taking unto Himself the judgment due a fallen race. As our Representative He assumed our legal liability when He suffered the consequence of our sin. The Father "made Him who knew no sin to be sin in our behalf, that we might become the righteous of God in Him"<sup>2</sup> (2 Corinthians 5:21; cf. Galatians 3:13; Romans 5:18).

By identification with the nature of His sacrificial act, we are declared just, and introduced into a state of righteousness. It is a decree from the high court of heaven establishing an entirely new relationship toward God. Both our relation to Him and His attitude toward us is changed through the cross. God's nature is not changed; He is forever the same. But the way He looks at us is different. He sees us as we are in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30). In Him there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1). The justified person thus stands before God free of all sin. "Therefore let it be known unto you, brethren, that through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38, 39).

"Imputation" or "reckoning" is a term used to explain the way Christ's merit and character is ascribed to the sinner. The word means that the righteousness by which we are justified is not our own; it is Christ's, and is accounted to the believer entirely by God's Word of grace. Paul cites Abraham's experience as an illustration of the principle. While Sarah was barren, God told Abraham that he would have a son though empirical reason seemed to the contrary. Yet the old patriarch did not stagger at the promise of God, being fully persuaded that what God said He would also perform. "Therefore, it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Romans 4:22; cf. 3, 9, 23; Galatians 3:16; James 2:23; Genesis 15:6). Accordingly, Abraham was made the father of many nations "in the sight of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist" (Romans 4:17). In the same way, we are to believe when the Gospel tells us that we have been made righteous in Christ, who "was delivered up for our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:25).

Akin to this truth is the concept of "reconciliation" in Scripture. Here the focus is upon bringing together two parties that were once separated. That sin which kept us apart is now removed, for "God was in Christ reconciling the world to

Himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19). The resulting relationship is one of harmony and friendship. “Having made peace through the blood of His cross,” we who were “formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds,” He has now “reconciled in His fleshly body through death” (Colossians 1:20-22).

The word “redemption” reflects much the same idea. As applied to man, it means to buy back and to loosen the bonds of a prisoner setting him free. Commonly the term in Jesus’ day referred to the amount required to purchase the life of a slave; or in a slightly different rendering, it might be used in the context of ransom where a sum of money was supplied as the condition of release. Relating this concept to Christ’s work, His blood is the purchase price of our redemption (1 Peter 1:18, 19; Hebrews 9:12; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14). Through His cross we are ransomed from death and hell (Matthew 20:28; 1 Timothy 2:6). The shackles of sin are broken. Satan has lost his hold. There is a change of ownership. We belong now to Him who gave Himself for us. As Christ’s bondslaves we are His treasured possession— His to keep, His to use, His to enjoy forever.

We bless Thee, Jesus Christ our Lord Forever be  
Thy name adored: For Thou, the sinless One,  
has died, That sinners might be justified.

O very Man, and very God, Who has redeemed  
us with Thy blood; From death eternal set us  
free, And made us one with God in Thee.  
(C. Vischer)

### **Relation to the Atonement**

Running through all these terms is the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He died in our place. We were all sold unto sin, under the sentence of death. But in God’s amazing love, Jesus offered Himself as our Redeemer. The life we now have in Christ is inseparable from His shed blood on the cross.



Forgiveness through grace does not mean that God mercifully overlooks sin as if it were of no consequence. Such a view may have appeal to people who sentimentalize God's nature of love. But it has no validity in Scripture. Sin as the repudiation of God necessarily invokes His judgment. Anything, which scorns His nature, cannot be ignored. Something must be done to remove the divine wrath incurred because of sin.

How this can happen is represented by the term "propitiation." In pagan religions, it usually had reference to what man could do to appease the offended deity. However, when used in the Bible, it is God who takes the initiative in removing His wrath. A gift is offered, but it is God who offers it in Christ. He gives His blood. The gift is pleasing to the Lord because it displays His own glory in that He sacrifices His life for the creature of His love.<sup>3</sup>

Christ's blood changes the whole nature of our salvation. God is seen as both the subject and the object of propitiation. His wrath is removed, not because we do anything, but because He did something. From beginning to end, it is a display of His sovereign grace.

God hates evil, but He loves man. His love blazes against that which would destroy His beloved—a love so pure that it would not let us go even while we were yet sinners. "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10; 2:2; Romans 3:25). Through the cross God discloses His love in terms consistent with His justice and holiness. By making Christ our Substitute, He satisfied Himself while at the same time forgiving us.

Regrettably, this concept of substitution is often ignored by modern theologians. Some relate it all to myth.<sup>4</sup> A more common approach, however, is to interpret Christ's death primarily as a revelation of love or self-dedication. The sacrifice is not regarded as changing the relationship of God to man, but as furnishing the basis for an appeal to the sinner. The force of the cross is directed man-ward, not God-ward.<sup>5</sup> A recent

creedal formulation of this moral influence idea, reminiscent of ancient Socinianism, is the new doctrinal statement of the United Methodist Church.<sup>6</sup>

Certainly the cross does reveal God's love, just as it discloses Christ's perfect obedience to the divine will. In recognizing this truth, however, we dare not minimize the satisfaction of divine justice through Christ's willing sacrifice on our behalf. John Wesley put it bluntly when he said: "If, as some teach, God never was offended, there was no need of this propitiation. And, if so, Christ died in vain."<sup>7</sup> The founders of Methodism, as the Reformers and the most revered fathers of the church universal, have all recognized the full, complete, and perfect sacrifice of Christ for the sins of the whole world. Interpretations of the atonement may be different, but at its heart is the objective fact that Calvary covers it all. The "work is finished!" Through His blood we have a new and living way into the very presence of God.

Arise, my soul, arise;  
 Shake off thy guilty fears:  
 The bleeding Sacrifice  
 In my behalf appears:  
 Before the throne my Surety stands,  
 My name is written on His hands.  
 He ever lives above,  
 For me to intercede;  
 His all-redeeming love,  
 His precious blood to plead;  
 His blood atoned for all our race,  
 And sprinkles now the throne of grace.  
 (Charles Wesley)

### **New Life in Christ**

More than a change of relationship is ours in this new freedom. Men dead in trespasses and sins, not only die with Christ in the cross, but are raised in the power of His resurrection to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). With

justification comes regeneration of the human personality and adoption into the family of God. There is an actual change of character in the heart of man through the impartation of the Holy Spirit. Justification may be viewed as Christ for us; regeneration may be described as Christ *in* us. Though different in nature, both belong to the miracle of conversion.

The Bible speaks of this transformation as a new birth, “born of the Spirit” (John 3:3-8); “born not of flesh, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13; cf. 1 John 3:9; 4:7). It is “a new creation; the old things pass away; behold, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Old corrupted self is laid aside, and a new self is put on, “which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Ephesians 4:22-24).

Clearly something happens whereby the inner man is changed. This does not mean that God destroys human nature and ability. Rather He takes the natural powers of man and bends them to their true created purpose. In this sense, Christ enables one to fulfill his destiny as a man created in the image of God (Colossians 3:10, 11). Only a person indwelt by His Spirit can live for real.

Renewed by this new principle within, the soul embraces and delights in the holiness of God. To the extent that the heart is controlled by the Spirit of Christ, the mind, the emotions, and the will act in conformity to the divine will. Love motivates life so that obedience to the law becomes a joy. The love of God in turn moves one to love himself, which overflows love for his neighbor. Spiritual perceptions are heightened, and with it a whole new system of values comes into focus. That which brings glory to God is seen now as the chief end of man.

It all centers in Christ whom the indwelling Spirit exalts within the believing heart. He is “all and in all” (Colossians 3:11); not as some theological abstraction or creedal dogma, but as a living Reality. There is fellowship with a personal Savior, a mystical union so real that Christ can be said to live in us and we in Him (John 15:4; cf. 14:20; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27;

3:4). Through His indwelling Presence the fruits of the Spirit savor our lives with something of His own life quality (Galatians 5:22).

Regeneration is only the beginning. Life in Christ is always roving “on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God” (Philippians 3:14); growing in “the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). There is no end to it. Whatever we may have experienced heretofore, the best is yet to be. What this implies is staggering to comprehend. “Beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord,” relentlessly we are “being transformed in the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

This process of conformity to Christ is called sanctification. It means that God’s Spirit is continually working within our heart setting apart a people for Himself. Like any surgical operation, the undertaking is not easy. There are times of suffering and pain. As understanding of God’s will enlarges, misdirected areas of our present experience, including our carnal disposition of self-centeredness, must be brought into harmony with the obedience of our Lord. But through it all, we may be assured that God is seeking our best interests. He intends to “present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:27).

The secret of this ever-expanding life in the fullness of the Spirit is simply to walk in the truth of God’s Word. “If we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). This requires a daily yielding of our lives to His control. It is the attitude of perfect delight in the Father’s will. Why should we fear? He never makes a mistake. And “all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God” (Romans 8:14).

There is no doubt about it! For in Christ we “have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, Abba! Father!” (Romans 8:15). This is not some supposition of hope, but a direct witness of the Spirit Himself with our spirit “that we are children of God” (Romans 8:16). With all other members of His family, breathtaking as it may seem, we are now the “heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17).

Christians who do not rejoice in the assurance of their salvation are surely an anomaly to the New Testament church. For the Spirit testifies through the Word that our sins are forgiven—they are nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:13, 14). Delivered from the judgment of the law, we have peace with God (Romans 5:1). Fear of the future is gone. The grave has lost its hold. We have already passed from death unto life (John 5:24; 1 John 3:14). We do not know all the circuitous ways that our faith will be tested in this world, but we know Whom we have believed, and are sure that He will keep that which is committed unto Him (2 Timothy 1:12). Come what may, we are more than conquerors through our victorious Lord. And nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:37-39).

Little wonder then, an air of celebration surrounds the apostolic witness. Just to think that we are united with Christ in an eternal bond of love—chosen in Him before the worlds were made (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 2:4). And whom God “foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1:5). In Him we “have obtained an inheritance,” that we “should be to the praise of His glory” (Ephesians 1:11, 12) “He has made us to be a kingdom” (Revelations 1:16); “a chosen race, a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9); possessing in Christ “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:3).

What more can we say? God is for us! His infinite desire to “freely give us all things” can only be measured by His sacrifice at Calvary (Romans 8:32). Our finite minds cannot imagine the “breadth and length and height and depth” of such love. Yet, lost in its wonder, we know that God wants to fill us

with His fullness. And He “is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us” (Ephesians 3:18-21).

O for a heart to praise my God!  
A heart from sin set free;  
A heart that always feels Thy blood,  
So freely spilt for me;  
A heart in every thought renewed,  
And full of love divine,  
Perfect, and right, and pure, and good,  
A copy, Lord, of Thine!  
(Charles Wesley)

### **Grace and Faith**

All who believe on Jesus Christ have title to this life, for it is entirely a gift of God. Whether only the elect have this enabling grace to believe, as classical Calvinists contend; or as Arminians insist, God’s prevenient grace extends this ability to all men, the fact remains that “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). No other response to divine grace is expected. “As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His Name” (John 1:12; cf. Acts 16:31; Hebrews 10:39; Romans 10: 4).

By this is meant that the atoning sacrifice of Christ “once and for all” at Calvary is believed to be just that— it is offered and accepted as my own. Saving faith is not an intellectual consent to the credibility of His work, nor a willingness for reformation of character; it is a complete reliance upon the Person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who gave Himself for me.

Such faith, of course, is accompanied by repentance—a complete change of mind and purpose (Luke 13:3; Matthew 9:13; Romans 2:4; 2 Timothy 2:25; 2 Peter 3:9). Until there is godly sorrow for sin and the willingness to turn from it, one may

question how genuine is faith. It is academic as to which comes first. What needs emphasis is that both are co-joined, and flow together from the gracious working of the Holy Spirit. The penitent man knows that in his own merit he is nothing, and confessing his guilt and corruption, casts himself upon the mercies of God. In this feeling of helplessness and dependence he lives thereafter determined to keep God's commandments.

Still it is God that makes it possible. From beginning to end redemption is the drama of "*sola gratia*"—grace alone. Resolution of amendment, noble deeds, high morality, fervent prayer, self-denial, sacramental rites—these good things are not unwanted by God; but finally nothing that man does himself can make him worthy of his Savior's justifying act. We simply say yes to God's will. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, that no one should boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

Theological friction between Protestants and Catholics becomes evident at this point. Official Roman doctrine asserts that justification comes partially through the infusion of supernatural grace at baptism. This has the effect of equating justification with sanctification, and allows to some degree divine bestowal of mercy because of what man is.<sup>8</sup> Justification is thus seen not as a completed action, but as a gradual process through life; faith is only the first act. The believer is progressively made righteous as he grows in sanctification. Not only does this view confound the biblical meaning of justification, but it also tends to make Christian growth the result of faith plus something else.

While evangelical Protestant theologians are agreed that salvation comes entirely by faith, there is an interesting difference between Calvinists and Arminians concerning its origin. Calvinists, following their view of the eternal decree, hold that the heart of man is "passive with respect to that act of the Holy Spirit whereby it is regenerated."<sup>9</sup> Only after the heart is awakened by God's exertion of creative power can the soul exercise saving faith. According to this position, a form of

regeneration precedes justification, though in point of time it may be concomitant. This perspective stresses that regeneration is accomplished apart from human initiative, but it may also allow room for carelessness on the part of those who are not inclined to repent and obey the Gospel.

Arminians, on the other hand, believe that justification and regeneration are two sides of the same coin. It is contended that faith for righteousness is imputed by the grace of God, not the object of that faith. Such faith is not regarded as having any personal merit. Rather it is simply the free gift of God by which the righteousness of Christ is appropriated.

In fairness to all these views, no one wants to minimize the obligation to keep God's law. As James affirmed, "Faith, if it has no works, is dead" (James 2:17; cf. Matthew 25:34-46; Galatians 5:6). Even those like Luther who had a hard time with this passage still contend for faith expressing itself freely in obedience to the Word of God.<sup>10</sup> That we live entirely by grace in no way implies liberty to sin. Something is wrong with any concept of justification, which does not result in holiness of life. We must take exception to those who insist justification may be completely hidden with no evidence of personal transformation and outgoing concern for others. Such a view would be in contradiction to God's redemptive purpose and creative power. The pietists, and later Wesleyans, rose as a protest to this kind of scholastic maneuvering. However one may formulate a theological explanation for the divine act, the words of Isaac Watts express man's only reasonable response:

When I survey the wondrous cross  
 On which the Prince of Glory died,  
 My richest gain I count but loss,  
 And pour contempt on all my pride.  
 Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
 That were a present far too small:  
 Love so amazing, so divine  
 Demands my soul, my life, my all.



### A Living Example

The relationship between justifying faith and transformation in Christ can be seen vividly in the experience of John Wesley. For years he had sought to know the reality of personal righteousness. Unsparingly he devoted himself to attain God's blessing through works of devotion and charity—he engaged in regular Bible study and prayer, entered into a small group to seek with others holiness of life, observed frequent attendance at Holy Communion, visited the sick and those in prison, gave generously of his means to the poor and naked, served as a minister of the Gospel at home and abroad—but all to no avail. He still had no assurance of salvation.

By the spring of 1738 Wesley was convinced that the cause of his “uneasiness was unbelief; and that the gaining a true, living faith was the ‘one thing needful.’”<sup>11</sup> Still, as he put it, “I fixed not this faith in its right object. I meant only faith in God, not faith in or through Christ. Again, I knew not that I was wholly void of this faith, but only thought I had not enough of it.”<sup>12</sup>

However, his honest searching of the Scriptures, and the supporting testimony of the confident Moravians, finally resolved all his doubts. He became “thoroughly convinced that a true living faith in Christ is inseparable from a sense of pardon for all past and freedom from all present sins,” that this faith was “the free gift of God; and that he would surely bestow it upon every soul who earnestly and perseveringly sought it.”

Not long after this at a little place on Aldersgate Street, at about a quarter before nine, his quest was fulfilled. While a layman was reading from Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans, describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, Wesley said: “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”<sup>13</sup>

This simple, childlike trust in Jesus was the experience, which Wesley so long had sought. Yet his

“strangely warmed heart” was not kindled by emotional pleas. Listen to some of the words John Wesley heard that day:

The work of the law is everything that one does or can do, towards keeping the law of his own free will or by his own powers. But since under all these works and along with them there remains in the heart dislike for the law, and the compulsion to keep it, these works are all wasted and of no value. That is what St. Paul means when he says: ‘By the works of the law no man becomes righteous before God...’ To fulfill the law, however, is to do its works with pleasure and love, and to live a godly and good life of one’s own accord, without the compulsion of the law. This pleasure and love for the law is put into the heart by the Holy Ghost. But the Holy Ghost is not given except in, with, and by faith in Jesus Christ. And faith does not come save only through God’s word or gospel, which preaches Christ, that he is God’s Son and a man, and has died and risen again for our sakes....

Hence it comes that faith also makes righteous and fulfills the law; for out of Christ’s merit it brings the Spirit, and the Spirit makes the heart glad and free as the law requires that it shall be... Faith, however, is a divine work in us. It changes us and makes us to be born anew of God (John 1); it kills the old Adam and makes altogether new and different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers, and it brings with it the Holy Ghost. O, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith, and so it is impossible for it not to do good works incessantly. It does not ask whether there are good works to do,

but before the question rises it has already done them, and is always at the doing of them  
 Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man would stake his life on it a thousand times. This confidence in God's grace, and knowledge of it, makes a man glad and bold and happy in dealing with God and with all his creatures; and this is the work of the Holy Ghost in faith. Hence a man is ready and glad, without compulsion, to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything, in love and praise to God, who has shown him this grace; and thus it is impossible to separate works from faith, as impossible as to separate heat and light from fire.<sup>14</sup>

The compact between saving faith and experiential righteousness could scarcely be stated more clearly. That Wesley understood it is immediately apparent by the way he began with all his might to pray for those who had despitefully persecuted him, while also openly testifying to the transformation felt in his heart. Salvation was a personal experience. Not on the basis of anything he had done, nor because there was any inherent righteousness of his own, but only on the basis of what Christ had done for him through the cross. There was no diminishing of good works, but now they followed out of love in grateful obedience to his Lord.

I build on this foundation—  
 That Jesus and His blood  
 Alone are my salvation,  
 The true eternal good;  
 Without Him, all that pleases  
 Is valueless on earth;  
 The gifts I owe to Jesus  
 Alone my love are worth.  
 (Paul Gerhardt)

### **Always Contemporary**

Modern churchmen may look wistfully to the witness of John Wesley and lament that things are different in the twentieth century. Ironically, Wesley thought the same thing when Peter Böhler first tried to convince him of this saving reality. Even when he was persuaded that it was the teaching of the New Testament and the experience of the early Christians, he argued: “Thus, I grant, God wrought in the first ages of Christianity; but times have changed. What reason have I to believe he works in the same manner now?” He was only “beat out of this retreat,” he says, “by the concurring evidence of several living witnesses who testified God had thus wrought in themselves.”<sup>15</sup>

His confrontation at Aldersgate erased all doubt. What the New Testament and the “living witnesses” had taught him now became a personal reality. To be sure, times had changed, but He found that the Gospel of God’s redeeming love is forever the same. “The same resources that were available to the first Christians were available to him. And the same resources are available still for us, by the same grace of God and the same ‘living, busy, active, mighty faith’ of Paul, of Luther, of Peter Böhler and the Wesleys.”<sup>16</sup>

This is the message of justification that is always contemporary. It is a doctrine that must be experienced in the present with every generation. How it happens, its manner and mode, the cultural pattern it reflects is inconsequential. All that matters is that salvation by faith in Jesus Christ become a living reality. This experience in turn motivates the believer to proclaim the good news to those that have not heard.

The constraining impulse to tell the story is seen on that evening of May 24 when John Wesley burst into the room of Charles exclaiming, “I believe.” The two overjoyed brothers, joined now in spirit as well as flesh, lifted their voices in song. And in that union of hearts we, too, can join a perpetual celebration of love.

Where shall my wondering soul begin?  
How shall I all to heaven aspire?  
A slave redeemed from death and sin,  
A brand plucked from eternal fire,  
How shall I equal triumphs rise,  
Or sing my great Deliverer's praise?  
O how shall I the goodness tell,  
Father, which thou to me hast showed?  
That I, a child of wrath and hell,  
I should be called a child of God,  
Should know, should feel, my sins forgiven,  
Blest with this antepast of heaven!  
And shall I slight my Father's love?  
Or basely fear his gifts to own?  
Unmindful of his favors prove?  
Shall I, the hallowed cross to shun,  
Refuse his righteousness to impart,  
By hiding it within my heart?  
Outcasts of men, to you I call,  
Harlots and publicans and thieves!  
He spreads his arms to embrace you all;  
Sinners alone his grace receive;  
No need of him the righteous have;  
He came the lost to seek and save.  
Come, O my guilty brethren, come,  
Groaning beneath your load of sin!  
His bleeding heart shall make you room,  
His open side shall take you sin;  
He calls you now, invites you home;  
Come, O my guilty brethren, come!  
(Charles Wesley)

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *A Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (London: J. Clarke, 1953), p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Creation House, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> The most competent recent study of this concept which I have seen is Leon Morris's, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1955), pp. 108-274; cf. R. E. Coleman, *Written In Blood* (Old Tappan: Revell, 1972), pp. 104-113.

<sup>4</sup> Rudolf Bultmann would typify this school. Note, e.g., his *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. by H. W. Bartsch, trans. Reginald Fuller (New York: Harper, 1953), pp. 7, 8, 35, 37.

<sup>5</sup> Eminent scholars like C. H. Dodd, D. M. Baillie and Vincent Taylor are typical of this position. An insightful summary of the views of these men may be found in the chapters by Robert Nicole, "The Nature of Redemption," and Lorman Peterson, "The Nature of Justification," in *Christian Faith and Theology*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (New York: Channel Press, 1964), pp. 193-221, 363-370.

<sup>6</sup> Entitled "Our Theological Task," this statement constitutes Section 3 of the Report of the *Theological Study Commission on Doctrine and Doctrinal Standards*, which was adopted at the 1972 General Conference of the United Methodist Church. In striking contrast to *The Articles of Religion*, and the standards of doctrine of historic Methodism, the new position avoids any reference to an objective vicarious atonement. All it affirms is that "in the midst of our condition of alienation, God's unailing grace shows itself in his suffering love working for our redemption." The work of Christ is seen only as a "clue to God's redeeming love." This position is totally unfair to the witness of Scripture. Those who follow this new course digress from the faith of historic Methodism, as well as the avowed doctrinal commitment of Asbury Theological Seminary.

---

<sup>7</sup> John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (London: The Epworth Press, 1952, c. 1754), p. 530; cf. pp. 531, 532, 536, 742, 801, 879, 905. Wesley does not labor to formulate any particular theory of the atonement, but he consistently affirms the fact that “the offering of Christ, once made, is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world” Article XX, *The Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church*.

<sup>8</sup> *The Catholic Bible Encyclopedia* defines righteousness as “the permanent state of those who are inherently righteous (just) or inwardly sanctified, because through the merits of Jesus Christ they have been justified by the real remission of their sins as well as by a true inward renewal and sanctification wrought by sanctifying grace intrinsically inhering in the soul” (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, 1955), p. 552.

<sup>9</sup> A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972, c. 1860), p. 460.

<sup>10</sup> There is considerable difference of opinion regarding Luther’s position on justification and the resulting life of obedience. Some scholars like Karl Hall contend that Luther believed justification involved actual moral transformation of a sinner into a saint. Approaching the justification of man analytically, he held that God’s judgment is viewed eschatologically on the basis of what man shall become. Theologians like Barth take strong exception to this interpretation, believing that it is little different than the Roman Catholic teaching. The problem centers in subjectivizing the act of God’s grace. However, this does not have to be the case, it seems to me, if the norm of God’s truth in Jesus Christ is kept clearly in focus. Perhaps it would be best, not to strain the basic forensic sense of justification, but to note the inseparable relation of justifying faith to regeneration and sanctification. Note the discussion of this issue in G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Justification* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1954), pp. 9-22.

<sup>11</sup> John Wesley, *Journal of the Rev. John Wesley*, std. ed., ed. by Nehemiah Curnock (London: The Epworth Press, 1938), Vol. I, p. 471.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 475, 476.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther, *Works of Martin Luther*, Vol. VI (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1932), pp. 449-452.

<sup>15</sup> John Wesley, *Journal*, op. cit., pp. 454-455.

<sup>16</sup> Philip S. Watson, *The Message of The Wesleys* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), p. 18.



### Works Cited

- Berkouwer, G. C. *Faith and Justification*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1954.
- The Catholic Bible Encyclopedia*. New York: Joseph F. Wagner, 1955.
- Coleman, Robert E. *Written In Blood*. Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell, 1972.
- Henry, Carl F. H., ed. *Christian Faith and Modern Theology*. New York: Channel Press, 1964.
- Hodge, A. A. *Outlines of Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972, c. 1860.
- Kittel, Gerhard. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964.
- Lampe, G. W. H., ed. *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*. London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., 1954.
- Luther, Martin. *A Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*. London: J. Clarke, 1953.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Works of Martin Luther*, Vol. VI. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1932.
- Morris, Leon. *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1955.
- Watson, Philip S. *The Message of the Wesleys*. New York: Macmillan, 1964.
- Wesley, John. *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*. London: The Epworth Press, 1952.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Journal of the Revelations John Wesley*, Vol. I. Std. ed., ed. by Nehemiah Curnock. London: The Epworth Press, 1938.
- Wiley, H. Orton and Culbertson, Paul T. *Introduction to Christian Theology*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1949.



Franklin Morrison at 50th Anniversary Banquet.

In honor of Asbury Theological Seminary's 90th anniversary, First Fruits Press has released several historic works published by the seminary in the past.

For its 40th anniversary in 1963, President Frank Stanger had three books published to celebrate the special event. These included a biography of Asbury Theological Seminary founder Henry Clay Morrison by Percival A. Wesche, a brief history of Asbury Theological Seminary by Howard Fenimore Shippo, and a volume of chapters on special theological emphases written by various faculty members. All three of these out-of-print works will now be released again as part of this special 90th anniversary set.

On the 50th anniversary of Asbury Theological Seminary in 1973, President Stanger celebrated with a series of special lectures and scholarly papers to be given throughout the academic year of 1973-1974. Key faculty were assigned important theological topics and orally presented these papers in Estes Chapel. They have never been published until now in this special 90th anniversary set.

First Fruits Press is delighted to bring the voices of some of Asbury Theological Seminary's past to a new audience as we celebrate 90 years of serving God and spreading scriptural holiness throughout the world!



asburyseminary.edu  
800.2ASBURY  
204 North Lexington Avenue  
Wilmore, Kentucky 40390