

“The just shall live by his faith”

Habakkuk 2:4

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Introduction: “This text (Habakkuk 2:4b), which later became the watchword of Christianity, is the key to the whole book of Habakkuk & is the central theme of all the Scriptures” (Feinberg). Wiersbe says, “*The just shall by his faith*’ was the watchword of the Reformation, & they may well be the seven most important monosyllables in all of church history.” But before we look at the second half of this verse, note how it begins: “*Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him.*” The phrase, “*lifted up*” speaks of pride, even arrogance. It refers to the soul of the proud Babylonians, which was “puffed up” & not “*upright*” with God, but rather full of deceit & dishonesty, & on the path to destruction. “Pride leads to death because it will not receive by faith the grace of God” (Feinberg). What is it that keeps a man, woman, boy or girl, from trusting in Christ for salvation? Is it not pride? Pride & self-sufficiency go hand in hand. John speaks of “*the pride of life*” (I John 2:15-17), which is not “*not of the Father, but is of the world.*” Christ says, “*Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, & become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 18:3-4). The song writer put it this way, “Naught have I gotten but what I received; Grace hath bestowed it since I have believed; Boasting excluded, pride I abase; I’m only a sinner saved by grace!” (“Only a Sinner” by James Gray).

The contrast then comes next, “*but the just shall live by his faith.*” This is again the key to understanding Habakkuk’s prophecy. God is saying to Habakkuk, & to all mankind today, “Trust Me.” Let’s consider tonight the 3 times this verse is quoted in the N.T. I believe that each time it is referenced by the N.T. writer there is a slight distinction in emphasis.

I. Romans 1:17, “...*the just shall live by faith.*”

A. The emphasis: “*the just*” > the key is salvation

1. The just one is contrasted with the proud (cf. Romans 1:30, “*proud*” as part of the description of the unrighteous).
2. The just one is characterized by his *position*.

B. The explanation:

1. This is the **declaration** of righteousness (see verse 16, “*salvation*”).
2. This is the declaration of a righteous position (see Romans 3:22 & cf. 10:10).

Summary: This is sometimes called “imputed righteousness.”

II. Galatians 3:11, “...*the just shall live by faith.*”

A. The emphasis: “*shall live*” > the key is sanctification

1. The just one is again contrasted with the proud (cf. Galatians 3:10, 13, “*cursed*” as a result of trying to live by the law & be saved by it).
2. The just one is characterized by his *condition*.

B. The explanation:

1. This is the demonstration of righteousness (see I John 3:7 & cf. :10-18).
2. This is the demonstration of a righteous condition.

Summary: This is sometimes called “imparted righteousness.”

III. Hebrews 10:38, “*Now the just shall live by faith...*”

A. The emphasis: “*by faith*” > the key is **security**

1. The just one is again contrasted with the proud, who have “faith” in themselves?
2. The just one is characterized by his *recognition* – “It is the opposite of swelling pride, of self-trust. It is humility before God, a readiness to conform to His will” (Wycliffe).

B. The explanation:

1. This is the **distinction** of righteousness (see Philippians 3:9, “*And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith*”).
2. This is the distinction of a righteous recognition (see Hebrews 10:38b-39, “*But we are not of them who draw back...; & cf. chapter 11*”).

Application: What is distinct about the believer & his faith? Is it true of you?

- (1) By faith we are saved > Ephesians 2:8-9.
- (2) By faith we live > Galatians 2:20.
- (3) By faith we please God > Hebrews 11:6.
- (4) By faith we walk > II Corinthians 5:7 (& cf. verse 6 & 8).
- (5) By faith we receive > Matthew 9:29.
- (6) By faith we overcome > I John 5:4.

Summary: Proverbs 3:5-6.

Conclusion: Does this verse describe you tonight? The just one has been declared righteous. He is characterized by a righteous **position** (imputed righteousness). The just one also demonstrates that he is righteous. He is characterized by a righteous **condition** (imparted righteousness). And the just one is distinguished as righteous. He is characterized by a righteous **recognition**. Remember how Christ describes the distinction of believers. In John 8:31 He declares that His disciples continue in His Word (“*If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed*”). In John 13:34-35 He declares that the disciple is known by His love for the brethren (“*By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another*”). And in John 15:8 He declares that His disciples bear fruit (“*Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples*”).

How about you tonight? Could Christ call you His disciple because you continue (read, study, obey) in His Word? Could He call you His disciple because you love the brethren, even as He loved the Church (sacrificial, sanctifying, satisfying love)? And could He call you His disciple because you are bearing much fruit (converts, condition, character, consecration)?

I believe we can call Habakkuk 2:4b the “watchword of Christianity” & “central theme of all the Scriptures” (with Feinberg), as well as “the seven most important monosyllables in all of church history” (with Wiersbe). But most important is the question, “Do these words describe you tonight?”