



FEED MY SHEEP

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Protestants vs. Rome on Justification

In the previous issue we introduced the doctrine of justification. We noted that it is part of a three-phase process of salvation consisting of justification, sanctification and glorification. All this was foreshadowed in the Tabernacle in the Wilderness.¹ Justification is therefore only the first step in this three-fold process of being ultimately saved. While defining justification in the last issue, we also gave a brief history showing what chief doctrinal difference led the Augustinian monk, Martin Luther, to finally break away from the Roman Catholic church: It was the correct understanding of justification, that our justification is *sola fide*² (by faith alone) and not by works.

This idea of *sola fide* became one of the rallying cries of the Protestant Reformation. But instead of accepting correction from one of their own, the Roman hierarchy proudly and stubbornly refused to admit error. Instead, they dug in their heels and eventually launched the Counter-Reformation to try to assert their authority over the souls of all men, and to attempt (in vain) to try to prevent the millions of European Christians from fleeing Rome's autocratic control. In this issue we will examine the doctrinal viewpoints of the Protesters vs. Rome, principally in regard to justification. The contrast is quite significant.

Imputation versus infusion³

First, Rome taught that justification means that God makes a person righteous. This is called *infused* righteousness. Contrariwise, the Reformers taught that justification means that a person is accounted as righteous by God; i.e., that man is justified by *imputed* righteousness. Here is the very simple manner in which the Romanists got confused and took a wrong doctrinal turn over the

centuries.

When the Scriptures were translated by Jerome into Latin (the Vulgate translation), the word which we render in English by the phrase "to justify" was rendered in Latin as *iustificare*. (There was no letter "j" in Latin and the letter "i" at the beginning of a word was pronounced like the "y" in "yellow.") This Latin word *iustificare* is a compound of two other Latin words. You can see the English word "just" in "iust-," and "-ficare" is a form of the Latin verb *facio*, "to make." Therefore, when the Scriptures were read in Latin over the centuries and the knowledge of Greek was lost to all but a few in the West during the Dark Ages, one can understand what happened.

Jerome probably chose what he thought was the best Latin word to carry the meaning of the Greek, but as we now see, *iustificare* means to "make just," or "make righteous," not to "account as just/righteous." The Latin translation simply did not carry the Hebrew and Greek concepts of justification accurately, and the truth was lost until Martin Luther rediscovered it. Martin Luther realized that his faith in God had not made him righteous; he realized he was still a sinner despite his faith. So for years he struggled trying to whip up enough faith to be made righteous. Of course, it was never enough and so at the abyss of despair God illuminated him with the truth that we are not actually made righteous by faith. Rather, God simply considers us as righteous.

A second great difference between Rome and the Protesters was that the Church of Rome taught that man is justified by God's work of grace in man. In contrast, the Reformers taught that man is justified by God's work of grace in Christ.

Thirdly, the papists taught that man is justified by faith...but then they add: "which has become active by love." — a real loophole for them. The Reformers taught

that man is justified by faith alone.

As we explore and explain these opposing positions, let me remind the reader how difficult it would be to explain this or prove this to a Roman Catholic. You see, we would say: "Well, let's open the Scriptures and see what God's Word says is the truth on these matters." Our Catholic friend⁴ will counter by saying: "No, let's go back in church history and see what our Holy Fathers [meaning their popes] have declared on these matters."

It's hard to get started in a search for truth if there is no common agreement on what the standard of truth is. The Protestant declares the Bible is the Word of Yahweh-God and it alone is the standard of truth, period. Scripture alone is the standard. (*Sola Scriptura*). The Catholic responds: "Yes, but, along with the Bible there are the various pronouncements by this man and that man (popes, cardinals, bishops, etc.)." In other words, the Catholics are taught to place the traditions of men on a par with God's Word. And until the Holy Spirit enlightens the Catholic's mind to the truth that there can only be one source of absolute truth in all things, and that that source must be the Deity Himself, there is nothing to discuss until that realization occurs.

Detailed examination of the Protestant vs. Roman positions

Let us then proceed to examine the Scriptures about these questions. Does justification make a man righteous or does it mean a man is accounted as righteous?

KJV Romans 4:1 What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?

2 For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath *whereof* to glory; but not before God.

3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it [his belief] was counted unto him for righteousness.

Neither this passage nor any other ever states that Abraham was an absolutely righteous man. No man who ever lived, save Christ Jesus, was totally righteous. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." The Reformers pointed out that the words "justify" and "justification" are legal and judicial words closely related to the ideas of trial and judgment. The words imply a declaration or a pronouncement from Yahweh's divine court of the Christian's right standing with God. Justification by itself does not mean a change in the believer in the absolute sense, but it is strictly a declaration of how the believer appears in the sight of God. Justification does not mean to actually make a believer absolutely righteous, but rather it means that God considers him as righteous.

Romans 4:5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

6 Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,

7 Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.

8 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

We must understand these critical differences in word meanings. To "impute" means "to charge to someone's account." To "infuse" means "to pour into." Example: when salt is poured into a glass of water, the water actually becomes salt water and it is distasteful to drink. The salt has been infused into the water. Here are Martin Luther's words describing the concept:

"Christian righteousness, therefore, as I have said, is the imputation of God for righteousness or unto righteousness, because of our faith in Christ, and for Christ's sake. When the popish schoolmen hear this strange and wonderful definition, which is unknown to reason, they laugh at it. For they imagine that righteousness is a certain quality poured into [emphasis mine - JWB] the soul, and afterwards spread into all the parts of man.... This unspeakable gift therefore excelleth all reason, that God doth account and acknowledge him for righteous without any works, which embraceth his son by faith alone..."⁵

One cannot find the word or the concept of infusion in the Bible in reference to justification (except in the mistranslated Vulgate version). But because of this infusion idea, the Roman church logically (by reason) concludes that justification is God's work of grace in a man, making the man righteous! The Reformers held that it was God's work of grace in Christ; that it is totally outside of ourselves. What does the Word of God say?

Romans 3: 21 But now the righteousness of God without [apart from] the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference:

23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;

25 Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

26 To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteous-

ness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Unquestionably, Paul is hard to understand. It might require reading the above passage several times. Did Christ's bloody sacrificial death cause righteousness to be poured into us, or did his redeeming act provide the cause for the Father to justify, to declare as righteous, the person who has faith in Jesus' righteousness? Obviously, the latter.

Another point of contrast to be examined from the Scriptures is whether we are justified by faith alone or by faith which has become "activated by love." Notice again what Paul declares:

Romans 3:27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.

28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without [i.e., apart from] the deeds of the law.

Paul points out that we have no cause or reason to boast, as though our justification were something that we earned by our works or deeds of the law. Moreover, the Reformers recognized that by Rome's attachment of works to faith for justification, Rome was trying to negate the truth of *sola fide*.

The role of the law in salvation

On the other hand, let us not be confused by Paul's words here concerning his teaching on the laws of God. Paul was not teaching that the law was abolished or anything of that nature. Remember, in these particular chapters of his epistle to the Romans, Paul is dealing with justification, the initial step towards complete salvation. We will see in future issues of FMS that the law is still very much a part of Paul's teachings and it should be central to the behavior of a Christian.

Even as obedience to the laws of God is part of the Christian life, that obedience will never earn salvation or justification for us. It was never intended to. Rather, it is the means of our sanctification (stage two) through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Paul never attacked the law as our means of sanctification; but he did condemn it as our means of justification. Here is a short method of remembering the difference between justification and sanctification: Justification is Christ's work for us. Sanctification is Christ's work in us (via the Holy Spirit).

In some out-of-the-mainstream Christian groups, the apostle Paul is looked upon with great suspicion, and some promote the idea that Paul's writings should never have been included in the canon of Scripture in the first place. One of the primary reasons for this viewpoint is that they

believe that Paul was teaching that God's laws were abolished and "nailed to the cross." In many mainstream and fundamentalist denominations, this antinomianism is accepted as part of their theology. But some of those who realize that God's laws were never abolished then target Paul as the chief culprit for "sabotaging" the pure and original Christianity—the Way. Their attacks on Paul are misguided. They are a result of failing to understand what we just stated in the previous paragraph; namely, that Paul only negated the law as a means of justification; he very much promoted the law as central to our sanctification.

Reconciling Paul and James

The reader may have noticed that we have quoted only Paul's writings for support of the doctrine of justification until this point. The anti-Paul zealots and the Roman church both point to the writings of James for primary support of their positions. Rome wants to add works as a requirement of justification and they point to James. The anti-Paul zealots also find support for their cause in the writings of James. Neither are able to reconcile the writings of Paul on the law with the writings of James. On the surface, Paul and James appear to flatly contradict each other. Observe the seeming contradictions. First, two witnesses from Paul's writings:

Romans 3:28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without [apart from] the deeds of the law.

Galatians 2:16 Knowing that 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 the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

And two witnesses from the writings of James:

James 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

James 2:24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

Two kinds of faith

The two saints appear to stand in stark and total opposition to one another. But let us examine them more closely and see if they cannot be harmonized. If they reader will take a moment to read and ponder the context surrounding each of these quotations, it will be evident that Paul and James are speaking of two entirely different types of faith. For Paul, faith is a total life commitment. He recounted his own sufferings and perils; the shipwrecks, the stonings he endured, the floggings, the prison time he

spent—all because he was totally committed to his faith in Christ. And this is the faith that Paul writes about throughout his epistles. It is a sincere, genuine, totally committed type of faith.

This is not to say that James' faith was any less so. However, the faith James writes about is not centered on his own personal tribulations but is another type or aspect of faith which we shall address further presently.

Galatians 5:6 For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

Faith works through love. There is a hint of how Paul and James are in harmony. But this verse is one which Rome points to for support of their "faith activated by love" position. And we can understand why. It seems to buttress their claim. Strangely enough, in their official scholarly works, the Roman church does give lip service to *sola fide*, but in practical outworking, Roman teaching results in making works a requirement of justification. It has been that way for centuries. Recall Martin Luther's soul-searching struggles. But the above verse *when read in context* gives no support for a faith-plus-works requirement for justification. Read Galatians 5:1-6. Verse 4 is especially conclusive in negating the idea that works has any part in our justification.

Galatians 5:4 Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

As we turn now to James, we will see that the type of faith that James was speaking about was phony faith—a faith which was a mere intellectual assent that certain things were true. In other words, it was head knowledge masquerading as faith. Addressing the masqueraders, James is dripping with sarcasm in the following verse:

James 2: 19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

So James is contrasting phony faith with saving faith. We just saw that Paul's faith works through love. James is in total agreement. Let's read the above verse in context now:

James 2:14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead,

being alone.

18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.

19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

To paraphrase the key point of the above, what James is saying is: "If your faith is *true* faith and not just head knowledge, then it will be proven by the love (works) that you manifest towards your brothers and sisters in Christ." In other words, if your faith is true faith, then your works will *follow* it and demonstrate it. The works themselves do not save you, but the works of love show that your faith is not mere words. Talk is cheap.

(Our study will pick up here next issue.)

Endnotes

1. We are now 20 tapes into our detailed study of The Tabernacle in the Wilderness... with still quite a bit more to come. A separate list of the individual taped studies is available, or to join the tape ministry and receive new tapes monthly, just request to be put on the tape ministry. (Some support for the tapes is expected from those receiving them; but you may sample them for a trial period of three months.)

2. Pronounced *so'-lah fee'-day*.

3. For a much more detailed study, we have available tapes #288 & 289: *Adam's Fall and Christ's Gift (The Doctrine of Imputation vs. Infusion)*. \$10 offering. Those two tapes are parts 9 & 10 of our album of ten tapes, *The Sovereignty of God*. \$33 offering ppd.

4. By the way, I do not condemn individual Catholics any more than I condemn Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses or fill-in-the-blank-brand Christians. I condemn the Roman Catholic system which enslaves the minds and hearts of their adherents. I know; I was one.

5. *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* from *Martin Luther: Selections from his writings* edited and with an introduction by John Dillenberger, Anchor Books, 1961.

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