

“THE OBEDIENCE of FAITH.”

By

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Author of “Christ’s Glorious Appearing,” etc., etc.**

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"The Obedience of Faith."

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QUESTION.—The Apostle Paul says that we are "justified by faith"; how then can Baptism have anything to do with our salvation? Is not Baptism part of "works" by which we cannot possibly be justified?

ANSWER.—The experience of the Apostle Paul, who proclaimed the doctrine of justification by faith, in his Epistle to the Romans (Romans iv. and v.), should be a sufficient reply to the first question.

When our Lord met him on the road to Damascus (as described in Acts ix.), he was first made to see that he was in the wrong in opposing Jesus, and then brought to believe in Him, and led to pray. Yet, after fasting and praying for three days, during which he had a vision of Ananias being sent to him, Paul's sins were not cleansed away until he had fulfilled "what he *must do*," which as the Lord had said should be revealed to him. In Acts xxii. 16, Paul says that Ananias came in to him, and said: "And now, why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the Name of the Lord."

As, therefore, no sinner can rightly be said to be in a state of grace,

converted or saved, whilst his sins are not cleansed away ; it follows that Paul was not freed from sin and made a partaker of salvation, until he had obeyed the command of the Lord by Ananias, and been baptized.

This leads us to ask what Paul really meant by saying we are " justified by faith ? " Did he mean what many so-called " Gospel " preachers teach, namely, that without any action on the part of sinful man, and wholly by a mental acceptance of the fact that Jesus Christ died for our sins, we are spiritually born again, " saved," and made children of God ? He certainly did not ; for he would thereby have denied his own experience and conversion, because *he* was not " justified " that way. Nor, on the other hand, did he mean that apart from the atonement of Christ, man could be saved by the performance of works, however " good " ; for his whole argument is against it.

A prayerful comparison of " Scripture with Scripture " ; and refusal to accept any view which is inconsistent with the perfect harmony of one part with another ;—these are the safe rules, under the Holy Spirit's guidance, for deciding the true teaching of the Bible, on this and all other matters.

James and Paul cannot contradict each other and both be right. And if one were wrong, both might be wrong ; and we should not know what to believe. No ! These two witnesses to God's truth are in perfect agreement, even though one says, " Abraham was justified by faith," and

the other, "Was not Abraham justified by works?" The study of Abraham's life shows that both views are right.

Abraham's faith accepted the promises of God, and so pleased God, and was accounted as righteousness. But Abraham's faith was great enough to lead him to act upon God's word; even when it meant leaving Ur of the Chaldees for an unknown destination; or, greatest test of all, offering up his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God.

Paul argues from the standpoint that the faith of Abraham was more acceptable to God than all the works of the law performed by the Jews, without faith. And James' statement, so far from contradicting Paul's, beautifully endorses it, by showing what God-acceptable faith really is.

And now we see that "Justification by faith" means, that by a living, active and obedient faith, and not by a mere acquiescence, we become partakers of the Atonement. Or as James beautifully expresses it in the case of Abraham: "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was *faith made perfect?*" (James ii. 22).

Paul's reasoning was intended to prove that "by the deeds of the Law, there shall no flesh be justified in God's sight" (Rom. iii. 20); and our own "dead works" cannot save us. The whole, and not part only, of the Epistle to the Romans, must be studied in this light to be rightly understood. The only way of Salvation for sinful man lies in God's acceptance of the sinless offering of Christ Jesus His Son, once for all on

Calvary. God's just demands upon mankind are satisfied by this Atonement ; of which acceptance, God "gave assurance unto all men, when He raised Jesus from the dead " (Acts xvii. 31). Paul is perfectly right when he says, " Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness " (Romans iv. 4, 5). Salvation is God's gift ; man cannot achieve it by his own works, but he can receive it on God's terms, and these are, by Faith which leads to obedience. There is a great difference, however, in our expecting to receive everything from the Lord by a mere assent to the fact that Christ died for us, without afterwards taking any steps to prove our faith, and the exercise of a real Faith in Christ which leads us to obey and follow Him. The so-called Faith of mere assent was not what Paul meant or taught, or he would have contradicted not only all his teaching elsewhere, and the personal experience of his own conversion, but also the plain teaching of the other Apostles.

When, convinced of their sin, those who believed the Gospel at Pentecost asked " Peter and the rest of the Apostles," " Men and brethren, what shall we do ? " They were not told, " Do nothing ; everything is done " ; but were told to prove their faith by their obedience to the Gospel. " Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins " (Acts ii. 37, 38).

Thus we are saved by God's unmerited grace, and the atoning blood of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and by no "works of righteousness which we have done." But before we can personally have part in this wondrous Salvation, God requires of us FAITH ;—not the faith of the devils who believe, and go no farther (James ii. 19), but FAITH WHICH OBEYS. This is the faith that brings justification ; and if we turn to the concluding verses of this Epistle to the Romans wherein so much is said about "justification by faith," we shall find proof that this is the truth. "The preaching of Jesus Christ," which "is now made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, MADE KNOWN TO ALL NATIONS FOR THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH" (Rom. xvi. 25, 26). And this linking of Faith and Obedience together, is further emphasized by the fact that the same word is used in the Greek New Testament for both "Disobedience" and "Unbelief" ; thus proving they are one principle.

What Paul understood and proclaimed as "the obedience of faith" can be seen in Acts xvi. 14, 15, 32, 33, etc., where he preached to Lydia, the gaoler, and others, "the word of the Lord," and baptized them when they professed to believe the Gospel. In Rom. vi. 3-5 and 16-18, he connects *righteousness with this obedience* ; and declares that he and those to whom he wrote "were Baptized into Jesus Christ,"—"buried with Him by Baptism." For our Lord and Saviour Himself has connected

Faith and Baptism together, and made them a condition of complete salvation : " Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved " (Mark xvi. 15, 16). Many who are ready to call Christ, " Lord, Lord," draw back when it comes to believing in Him enough to obey His commands. But He repudiates such faith as theirs, when He says : " Why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say ? " We have His own word that our love to Christ can only be proved by our obedience, (" He it is that loveth Me that keepeth My sayings ") ; and all the teaching of the Sacred Scriptures proclaims the fact that protestations or professions of love and faith are valueless in the sight of God, unless they lead to actions ; as did the faith by which Abraham was justified. " Even so, Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone " (James ii. 17). A " dead faith " will no more justify the sinner in the sight of God, than the " dead works " of his own self-righteousness can save him.

And this leads us to the second question : " Is not Baptism part of ' works ' by which we cannot possibly be justified ? "

Now, when the context of Rom. iii. 20, is carefully noted, it will be seen that the " works " which Paul said could not justify the doers, were " the works of the Law," as we have already shown. Baptism is an act of obedience in proof of the believer's faith in Christ ; and can no more be classed with " good works " which followers of Christ are commanded

to maintain carefully (Titus iii. 8), than with "dead works" from which repentance is required" (Heb. vi. 1, 2).

On God's part, Salvation is an act of His grace, through the merit and death of Christ Jesus; on our part, it is an act of faith, which appropriates the blessing through obedience to the conditions given in the Gospel. For there is no such thing as unconditional Salvation. In the Scriptures it is coupled with Repentance (Luke xxiv. 47), Faith (John iii. 36), Baptism (1 Peter iii. 21), and Confession of faith in Christ (Rom. x. 9, 10). None of these are "dead works" or unnecessary, for all of them are required of us; and if we desire to be saved eternally we shall not cavil over the conditions which the Giver of Eternal Life has attached to His gracious gift.

In conclusion, let us ask a few questions of the reader, and give the answers from Holy Scripture:—

(1). "The Baptism of Water, is it from Heaven, or of men?" God the Almighty is its Author. "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John." "And John bare record . . . I knew Him (Jesus) not, but He that sent me to baptize with water," etc. (John i. 6, 32, 33).

(2). Why was Jesus Baptized? As a necessary part of all righteousness, which it became Him, and also becomes us, to fulfil (Matt. iii. 15). If you are saved, it must be by a Baptized Saviour, Who has left us "an example that we should follow in His steps" (1 Peter ii. 21).

(3). Did our Lord preach and practise Baptism? He certainly

did. (Read John iv. 1, 2 ; John iii. 22, 26 ; Mark xvi. 16).

(4). Did the Lord Jesus command that all who believe in Him, all over the world, should be baptized ? Yes ; and He included Baptism in the world-wide Gospel message. (See Matt. xxviii. 18-20 ; Mark xvi. 15, 16 ; John iii. 5).

(5). Did not the Apostles, and all the first preachers of the Gospel who were sent of God, baptize all who believed ? They did ; and there were no unbaptized members of the New Testament Church. (Read Acts ii. 38:42 ; Acts viii. 12, 36-39 ; Acts ix. 18 ; Acts x. 47, 48 ; Acts xvi. 15, 33, 34 ; Col. ii. 6, 12 ; Gal. iii. 27, etc.).

(6). Has anyone the right to preach any other Gospel than that which Christ preached, and commanded His servants to preach, to all the world ? Decidedly not ! (See Mark xvi. 15, 16 ; Rom. xv. 19 ; Gal. i. 8, 9 ; 2 John 9-11, etc.).

(7). Then, since the Gospel of Christ includes the command to all who believe, that they should be Baptized ; WHY, if you profess to believe in Jesus, have you not obeyed "the Counsel of God" (Luke vii. 30), followed the example of your Lord (Matt. iii. 13), obeyed the teaching of Christ and His inspired Apostles (as given above), and thus proved that your faith is the faith which brings Justification before God through our Lord Jesus Christ ?

Reader, these questions are of immense importance. "Think on these things !" (Phil. iv. 8).

