

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

In the Light of Scripture

by

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CHAPTER TEN

JUSTIFICATION

IN PREPARATION for one of the late Dr. R. A. Torrey's evangelistic campaigns, thousands of leaflets were distributed bearing in large type the words, "Get right with God." That is the meaning of the word justification in its scriptural sense—to be "made right" with God. For sinful man is not "right with God." Indeed, the Bible tells us that he is an enemy (Romans 5:10). From being one in whom God found delight, and who found his delight in God, man has become alienated and an enemy by wicked words (Colossians 1:21).

Sin, which in its first entrance into the world by man's disobedience had seemed so trifling, in the early history of the human race had grown to alarming proportions:

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually . . . and it grieved him at his heart (Genesis 6:5, 6).

Grief implies love, love to the sinner, even while there is divine wrath against the sin. But that love could do nothing at the expense of righteousness and justice. Right and happy relationship could not be restored without sin being atoned for and thus put away.

But man could do nothing toward such a restoration. "**How should man be just with God?**" asks Job (Job 9:2). "**Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one**" (Job 14:4). Man stands before God defiled and guilty, and there is nothing he can do to restore himself to that condition of "**holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord**" (Hebrews 12:14).

As the wise woman said to David, when pleading for the restoration of his son Absalom who had killed his brother Amnon, "**We must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again.**" She went on to say, "**neither doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him**" (II Samuel 14:14). That was partly false and partly true, for God before executing judgment first makes a way of return for the sinner, if he will but take it. But if that way is rejected, then His judgment must fall.

Immediately after man's fall, God instituted sacrifice as a way of return to Himself. When the sinner in repentance brought the prescribed offering, God said: "**It shall be forgiven him**" (Leviticus 4:20, 26, 31, 35, etc.). True, the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins (Hebrews 10:4), but the sacrifice served to set forth the One to come, who could, and indeed did, "**put away sin by the sacrifice of himself**" (Hebrews 9:26).

He was made sin for us, our sin being laid upon Him, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him, His righteousness being put to our account (Isaiah 53:6; II Corinthians 5:21).

David allowed Absalom to return home from exile, but the sin was not dealt with on David's side, nor was there any repentance on Absalom's, so no fellowship was enjoyed, and the superficial restoration brought only shame and added sorrow.

God's restoration of the sinner, on the other hand, is a real thing, not glossing over sin, but putting it away by paying its penalty at the cross, and then by regeneration—renewing the soul in actual holiness. Justification, by which sin is blotted out and the sinner restored to fellowship with God, is a foundational process on which the subsequent Christian life is based:

Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls (I Peter 2: 24, 25).

To be justified, or “made right with God,” two things are essential: one on God's side, the other on man's, just as in reconciliation both parties concerned must do their part. In infinite love, and at infinite cost, God has done His part. **“Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”** (Romans 3:24). Grace and redemption on God's side. What on man's side? **“Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”** (Romans 5:1).

Our part is faith, by which we accept the redemption that God has provided through Christ. As we personally cast ourselves upon the mercy of God in repentance and faith, God makes over to us the righteousness of His well-beloved Son, **“who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth”** (I Peter 2:22), and we are justified.

In the triumphant language of the Apostle Paul, the justified soul can say,

Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us (Romans 8:33, 34).

We need to note the word **“freely”** in Romans 3:24: **“Being justified freely by his grace,”** for it is just here that the Church of Rome departs from the plain statement of the Word of God.

She admits that justification flows from the grace of God, that it comes through the redemption of Christ, and even that it is by faith, but she does not admit that it is free and without any payment on the part of the sinner. The great truth which flashed forth at the time of the Reformation was that justification was by faith and by faith alone, without any addition of man's work or merit. But Rome would have none of it, nor will she today. The Council of Trent, called together specially to combat the doctrines of the Reformation, declared:

Whosoever shall affirm that the ungodly is justified by faith only, so that it is understood that nothing else is required to co-operate therewith in order to obtain justification; and that it is on no account necessary that he should prepare and dispose himself by the effect of his own will, let him be accursed. Council of Trent, Sess. 6.

Whether or not this assertion is scriptural depends largely upon what is meant by *“co-operation therewith”* and *“by the preparation and disposal of himself by the effect of his own will.”*

If it means only “**repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ**” (Acts 20:21), then all would agree, for these things are essential. But neither are meritorious, so they can form no part of the ground of the sinner’s acceptance before God. For a man to repent of his sins is not a merit, nor even is faith in Christ. Not to repent and trust in Christ is added sin, for it disbelieves the witness of God given concerning His Son, making God a liar (I John 5:10), and it is the basest ingratitude and proof of obduracy, as we see from John 3:18, 19:

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

But Rome means more than repentance and faith, as other declarations of the Council show:

Whosoever shall affirm that men are justified solely by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ . . . to the exclusion of grace and charity which is shed abroad in their hearts, and inheres in them; or that the grace by which we are justified is only the favor of God, let him be accursed.

Here “*grace and charity shed abroad in the heart, and inherent*” are coupled with the righteousness of Christ as a ground of justification. But there is no “*grace and charity*” inherent in the heart of the unregenerate man.

Read the description in Ephesians 2:

You . . . were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

The inspired writer of the epistle finds no trace of true grace or charity inherent in the unregenerate heart of man to co-operate with the merits of Christ.

What then have we to bring to Him? Nothing but our sins.

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot;
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come.

The Holy Spirit does indeed shed abroad the love of Christ in the heart, but it is in the heart of the one who has been justified, as clearly stated in Romans 5:1-5:

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . . and rejoice in hope of the glory of God . . . And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Good works are not the root of justification, but the fruit.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Note the relationship of works: “**Not of works . . . unto good works.**”

The epistle of James is quoted by Romanism as supporting the necessity of works: “**Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone**” (James 2:17), and both Abraham and Rahab are brought forward as witnesses. That is truly so, for a faith which does not lead to action is dead, but not in the sense Rome means.

Abraham’s faith that God could even raise from the dead, if need be, the son through whom alone all the promises could be fulfilled, enabled him to obey the strange command God had given him; his obedience was faith in exercise.

So also with Rahab, when she hid the spies who came to her house in Jericho.

In Hebrews 11, both Abraham and Rahab are cited as examples of faith of which their action was the evidence. Only faith which acts is living faith, and what they did evidenced the faith that was in them. The Apostle James was writing to some who claimed to be Christians, but gave no evidence of it. These could in effect say to a hungry brother, “**Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled,**” and yet not give them the help they needed. To such he says, “**I will show thee my faith by my works**” (James 2:14-26).

The point of James’s argument is that faith which is in word only, and does not find expression in action is spurious. But it is still faith that justifies.

The Holy Spirit, indwelling the born-again soul, will produce in him the fruit of the Spirit: **love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance** (Galatians 5:22, 23), which things become inherent, the normal impulses of the new nature he has received. On his part, he has to see to it that these new spiritual impulses find expression outwardly in all that he says and does. Paul in writing to Titus says:

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us . . . that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:5-7).

Here we have justification by faith. Then he goes on to say:

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men (Titus 3:8).

Good works will certainly characterize the life of the justified soul, but *they are the result and not the ground* of his justification.

Salvation, to use a word frequently found in Scripture, comes to us by the full and free grace of God, made available to us through our Lord's death for us on the cross. It includes forgiveness, cleansing, justification (that is, making us right with God), regeneration or the new birth, imparting to us a new nature), sanctification (making us practically holy), and finally glorification (“**when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is**”—I John 3:2). On man's side, salvation, in all its fullness, is received through repentance and faith. Paul said to the Ephesian elders:

I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:20, 21).

And on many other occasions also:

Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man [Jesus] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses (Acts 13:38, 39).

“Justice God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine.”

~ end of chapter 10 ~

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