Justification by Faith Alone

Let us remind ourselves of a number of key perspectives that we need to keep in mind as we ponder the issue of justification by faith alone.

First, let’s remember that when we receive Jesus and are united to Him by faith, we receive all of His blessings. We not only receive Him as converting and regenerating Lord, but we also receive Him as our advocate before the Father. In this role, Jesus is continually making forgiveness and new legal standing available to the trusting, penitent sinner.

Second, I would strongly suggest that if we are to really get a grip on justification by faith in all of its radical implications for Christian experience, we need to carefully ponder the implications of the death of Christ for us. In other words, I am suggesting that the biblical understanding of justification by faith alone is closely tied to the whole concept of Christ our sacrifice who bore the penalty for our sin, as our substitute, in order to satisfy divine justice. Justification is very much a redemptive concept that is drawn from the world of law courts and matters of legal standing. It is no accident that some of the most forceful biblical evidence for the penal/substitution/ satisfaction view of the atonement is found in settings where the doctrine of justification is given classic expression (Romans 3, Galatians 3, II Corinthians 5).

Having said this, we also need to remember that the metaphors of legality, as important as they are, do not exhaust the theme of reconciliation. Let us always keep in mind that legal metaphors need to be complemented by family, friendship, business, and covenant metaphors.

Third, justification by faith is the work of God that is closely associated with conversion and regeneration. One cannot be fully converted or regenerated without justification. Thus the experience of the New Birth is intimately bound up with God’s forgiving grace and Christ’s ministry as the sinner’s constantly interceding priest/advocate who reckons us to be no longer deserving of death. The basis of this reckoning is that Christ not only died our death, but that He lived a perfect life and His perfect obedience is also reckoned as ours.

**CONVERSION DOES NOT CAUSE JUSTIFICATION**

Conversion does not cause justification, but prepares the way for it. When the sinner’s attitudes towards God and sin are changed to penitence and trust (as opposed to pride and self-dependence), then the sinner is primed to exercise faith in divine forgiveness and the acceptance of a new standing “in Christ.” Regeneration does not cause one to be justified, but justification prepares the way by providing the basis for God’s loving acceptance. It is this acceptance which enables us to move forward in character development and service. If anything, justification is the cause of sanctification. There is a very real sense in which justification must precede sanctification, and God’s acceptance provides the concrete, loving motivation for the sinner to serve and obey God.

**FOUNDATIONAL IMPORTANCE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE**

Now let’s get more precise. What exactly do we mean by the phrase “justification by faith alone”? When Christians, especially Protestant and Seventh-day Adventist Christians, use this term, they have traditionally wanted to rather carefully nuance their definition. And I must confess that I feel the need to be quite precise in this matter.

What follows is (1) a rather precise definition of justification, (2) the biblical support for it, (3) the Ellen White support for it, and (4) the summation of the implications of the doctrine for Christian experience, that is to say—spiritual formation. The latter aspect is especially critical as we need to express the dynamic interrelationship of justification to sanctification with some care. To put it more simply, forgiveness and legal standing need to be carefully coordinated with the whole process of regenerative character change.

Put another way, we need to be not only clear on the WHAT of justification, but also the SO WHAT. Not only do we need to understand what it is, but also why it is so important that it be what it is.

I alert the student: This issue is very foundational and central to any genuine growth in grace. If we mess up on this very basic issue, we are in grave danger of messing up the whole of our personal experience of salvation. This issue is truly at the bedrock. If we don’t set the house of faith on the secure footings of justifying grace, the whole superstructure of sanctifying grace can easily come tumbling down into a heap of either despair or self-righteous Pharisaism.

A Definition of Justification by Faith Alone

The core meaning communicated by these important words goes like this:

**JUSTIFICATION**

The expression “justification” comes from the world of the law courts and seeks to express foundational aspects of Christian experience in terms of legality and business dealing (especially the accounting side of business). It deals with moral and legal demands and how such demands are met or satisfied. The key terms involved in expressing the concept of justification are “forgive,” “account,” “reckon,” and “impute.”

**FAITH ALONE**

The two other key expressions associated with biblical justification are “faith” and “alone.” All of these expressions need to be carefully explained. Forgiven and Reckoned Perfect

What Christians have wanted to communicate by the concept of justification by faith is along the following lines:

The forgiveness and new legal standing accorded the penitent sinner is totally a free gift of God’s grace received by faith alone; it is not anything that the sinner can earn by any of his or her good works. God, for Christ’s sake, forgives and reckons the trusting, penitent sinner to be no longer condemned by the sins of the past (the work of forgiveness) and to be constantly accounted as perfect in Christ.

It could all be put another way: Forgiveness reckons the sins of the past to be covered or purged away by the perfect obedience of Christ in His active obedience, and the debt of the penalty to be satisfied by Christ’s passive obedience in dying an atoning death on the cross. We are justified by Christ’s perfect obedience which is put in place of our failure, and His death which was put in place of our deserved death. In other words, we are no longer under the condemnation of the law and sin as Christ bore our just desserts and has given us His complete victory over failure.

Some have called this “vicarious” or “imputed” “righteousness.” Vicarious simply means one taking the place of another. In this sense, Christ’s perfect life and sacrifice are put in place of our failure and its just rewards.

**FAITH**

Now what about “faith”? As was mentioned in the previous lesson, the term faith refers not so much to the mental assent of mere intellectual acknowledgment, but to the whole idea of personal trust. This is an understanding of trust which takes God’s offer at face value and personally appropriates the blessings of forgiveness and new, perfect legal standing. In other words, it is actually trusting that Christ lived and died for me and accepting the fact I am no longer under condemnation.

Many illustrations come to mind but one will suffice. If someone gives me a check for ten thousand dollars, the check will do me no good unless I trust the person who gave it to me enough to actually (1) reach out and take the check, (2) believe that they really will stand behind the check as a legitimate guarantor (the old word was “surety”), and (3) go to the bank, cash the check, and take possession of the ten grand. This is what righteousness by faith is about—we trustingly take the check in the belief that the money is there, and then actually take possession of the cash.

**ALONE**

The last concept, expressed by the word “alone,” is the one that is probably the most controversial. We need to express the meaning inherent in this concept with some care, even caution. Quite possibly the most important biblical metaphor which this concept grows out of is the idea that salvation is a “gift” (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

What the Bible seeks to communicate with this “gift” metaphor is that there is absolutely nothing that any sinner has done or could ever do to win or purchase the forgiveness and perfect legal standing that we receive “in Christ.” Obedience to both ceremonial and moral requirements of the law, the giving of alms and the returning of tithes, the practice of fasting, vigils, prayers, Christian service, evangelistic witnessing, and worship will never save the sinner. They are good, necessary, and even form the condition of salvation, but they never serve as the meritorious basis of our reconciliation with God. In fact, all of these things can even become a positive curse if we think that they will contribute to our reconciling acceptance with God. It is this idea which forms the basis for the awful curse of self-righteousness, what Paul calls “boasting” before God.

Let’s be very blunt and plain about this issue. Nothing that any penitent sinner could ever do (either in coming to Christ, or staying in Christ) will ever put God in debt to him or her. It is only through the gracious gift of the accounted merits of Christ’s perfect life and atoning death that sinners are reconciled to God. This is the core meaning communicated by the “faith alone” concept.

33 mins ago

**FAITH ALONE IS NEVER ALONE!**

**NOW MOST CERTAINLY SUCH SAVING FAITH WILL NEVER BE “ALONE”—IT WILL ALWAYS BE ACCOMPANIED BY THE EVIDENCE OF GOOD WORKS; THE “GOOD WORKS,” HOWEVER, ARE NOT WHAT EFFECTS RECONCILIATION. ONLY THE MERITS OF CHRIST’S ACTIVE OBEDIENCE IN PERFECTLY KEEPING THE LAW FOR US, AND HIS PASSIVE OBEDIENCE IN DYING FOR SINNERS, HAVE PROVIDED THE MERITORIOUS GIFT THAT WILL SAVE.**

**FAITH ALONE IS THE ROOT OF ALL PERSONAL SALVATION AND RECONCILIATION TO GOD. GOOD WORKS ARE THE INEVITABLE, EVIDENCING FRUIT OF ANY GENUINE MANIFESTATION OF FAITH ALONE. IF THERE IS NO ROOT, THERE WILL BE NO REAL FRUIT. IF THERE IS NOT FRUIT, IT IS A CINCH THAT THE ROOT IS DEAD.**

**IS THIS CONCEPT BIBLICAL AND IS IT CONFIRMED BY ELLEN WHITE?**

The Bible and Justification by Faith Alone

**SPACE DOES NOT PERMIT AN EXHAUSTIVE EXAMINATION OF THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE, BUT WE WILL DEAL WITH THE BEST AND CLEAREST TEXTS ON THE SUBJECT.**

**JESUS AND JUSTIFICATION**

**FIRST OF ALL, WHAT DID JESUS SAY ABOUT JUSTIFICATION? JESUS DID NOT EXPOUND THIS ISSUE WITH THE SYSTEMATIC, TECHNICAL PRECISION THAT IS MORE TYPICAL OF PAUL. JESUS SEEMS TO EXPRESS THE DYNAMIC IN MORE NARRATIVE WAYS.**

**TWO KEY PARABLES AND ONE STORY SEEM TO EXPRESS IT BEST.**

**THE “WEDDING FEAST”
THE FIRST PARABLE IS THE “WEDDING FEAST” RECORDED IN MATTHEW 22:1-14. I INVITE THE STUDENT TO READ THE PASSAGE. NOTE THAT THE PARABLE REACHES ITS CLIMAX WHEN THE FRUSTRATED KING GIVES UP ON ALL OF THE “SOMEBODIES” WHO HAD RUDELY REJECTED HIS WEDDING INVITATION. IT IS THEN THAT HE ORDERS HIS SERVANTS TO GO OUT INTO THE HIGHWAYS AND HEDGES AND ROUND UP ALL OF THE “NOBODIES,” “BOTH BAD AND GOOD.” THUS THE WEDDING FEAST WAS FURNISHED WITH GUESTS.
ONE CAN EASILY IMAGINE ALL OF THE SURPRISE AND JOY MANIFESTED BY THIS RAFFISH ASSORTMENT OF LOSERS WHO NOW FIND THEMSELVES PARTICIPATING IN A ROYAL WEDDING PARTY. IT IS, HOWEVER, IN THE MIDST OF THE FESTIVITIES THAT THE PARABLE TAKES A VERY DISTURBING AND SHOCKING TURN.
THE KING ARRIVES AT THE FESTIVITIES TO CHECK OUT THE “GUESTS” TO MAKE SURE THAT EVERYONE IS PROPERLY ATTIRED FOR THE OCCASION. HE FINDS ONE WHO HAS PRESUMPTUOUSLY REFUSED THE OFFERED WEDDING GARMENT. ALTHOUGH THE TEXT OF JESUS’ NARRATIVE DOES NOT EXPLICITLY SAY THAT ALL HAD BEEN OFFERED A FREE WEDDING GARMENT, THE POWERFUL IMPLICATION IS THAT THEY HAD. HOW WOULD IT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE FOR ALL OF THESE “NOBODIES” TO AFFORD A GARMENT FIT FOR A ROYAL WEDDING FEAST?
MOST CERTAINLY THIS “WEDDING GARMENT” IS A SYMBOL OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST THAT IS FREELY OFFERED TO ALL WHO ANSWER HIS SALVATION INVITATION (CF. ISAIAH 61:10 AND REVELATION 19:8). MOST CERTAINLY THIS IS A VIVID METAPHOR FOR THE FORGIVENESS AND PERFECT STANDING THAT THE LORD OFFERS WITHOUT PAYMENT ON THE PART OF THE DESTITUTE, SINFUL “NOBODY.”
THE “HIRED LABORERS”
THE SECOND PARABLE IS KNOWN AS THE “HIRED LABORERS” AND IS FOUND IN MATTHEW 20:1-16. ONCE AGAIN I URGE THE STUDENT TO GIVE THIS REMARKABLE STORY A CAREFUL READING. LET’S BRIEFLY REVIEW THE SETTING. IT IS THE TIME OF THE GRAPE HARVEST. GRAPES ARE NOT AT ALL LIKE TOMATOES WHEN IT COMES TO HARVESTING. TOMATOES CAN BE HARVESTED GREEN AND WILL RIPEN ON THE WAY TO MARKET; GRAPES, HOWEVER, CAN ONLY BE HARVESTED WHEN THEY ARE RIPE ON THE VINE. IF PICKED TOO EARLY OR TOO LATE, THEY SIMPLY ROT. THEY MUST BE GATHERED IN AT EXACTLY THE RIGHT TIME. THUS THE “HOUSEHOLDER” IS VERY ANXIOUS TO GET THE JOB DONE. HE HEADS OUT TO THE MARKETPLACE WITH A SENSE OF URGENCY TO HIRE HARVESTERS.
THE STORY THEN PROCEEDS WITH THE MASTER GOING TO THE MARKETPLACE AND HIRING WORKERS “EARLY IN THE MORNING” AND AGREEING TO PAY THEM “A PENNY” TO WORK THE WHOLE DAY. THE SITUATION, HOWEVER, MUST HAVE REALLY BEEN “RIPE” AND AT THE “THIRD HOUR” (ROUGHLY NINE IN THE MORNING), THE “SIXTH,” “NINTH” AND EVEN THE “ELEVENTH” HOURS HE GOES TO THE “MARKETPLACE” AND HIRES MORE WORKERS WITH THE PROMISE THAT HE WILL PAY “WHATSOEVER IS RIGHT.”
THINGS MUST HAVE GONE QUITE WELL, THAT IS, UNTIL THE END OF THE DAY AND THE TIME TO PAY THE WORKERS. IT IS THEN THAT THE PARABLE TAKES A MOST STARTLING TURN—EVERYBODY GETS PAID THE SAME NO MATTER HOW LONG OR HARD THEY HAVE WORKED!
WHAT ARE WE TO MAKE OF THIS SEEMING INJUSTICE?
FIRST OF ALL, THE PARABLE IS NOT A CLASSIC EXAMPLE OF FAIR EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES; I AM QUITE CONFIDENT THAT ANY LABOR ORGANIZER WOULD CONSIDER THIS “HOUSEHOLDER” A PRIME TARGET. THE OBVIOUS POINT OF THE PARABLE IS TWOFOLD:**

1. **IN GOD’S KINGDOM THE REDEEMED’S SALVATION STATUS IS NOT BASED ON WORKS—EVERYBODY IS PAID THE SAME NO MATTER HOW LITTLE OR MUCH THEY WORKED; SALVATION IS BY A LIVING RELATIONSHIP TO THE “HOUSEHOLDER,” NOT BY WORKS.**
2. **FAR FROM BEING SAVED BY WORKS, THE NEXT OBVIOUS POINT IS THAT IT IS SIMPLY A GREAT PRIVILEGE TO WORK IN THE VINEYARD OF THE LORD AND THIS IS THE SECOND TRUTH THAT THE PEOPLE WHO WORKED ALL DAY MISSED. IT IS PART OF GOD’S GRACE TO SHARE LABOR WITH HIM IN HIS VINEYARD, AND IN REALITY, THE FIRST HOUR WORKERS WERE THE ONES THAT WERE MORE BLESSED AND PRIVILEGED, NOT THE ELEVENTH HOUR WORKERS WHO ONLY GOT TO SHARE ONE HOUR WITH THE LORD IN HIS SAVING LABORS.**

**REGARDING THIS PARABLE’S LESSON ABOUT SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH ALONE, ELLEN WHITE’S COMMENTS ARE RIGHT TO THE POINT:**

**[GOD’S] REWARD IS GIVEN NOT ACCORDING TO OUR MERIT BUT ACCORDING TO HIS OWN PURPOSE. (ELLEN WHITE, CHRIST’S OBJECT LESSONS, PP. 397.)
[PEOPLE] WOULD THINK THEY COULD DO SOMETHING TOWARD EARNING A PLACE IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. THEY WOULD IMAGINE THAT WHEN THEY HAD MADE CERTAIN ADVANCEMENT, THE LORD WOULD COME IN TO HELP THEM. THUS THERE WOULD BE AN ABUNDANCE OF SELF AND LITTLE OF JESUS. (IBID., P. 400.)
THE REWARD IS NOT OF WORKS, LEST ANY MAN SHOULD BOAST: BUT IT IS ALL OF GRACE. (IBID., P. 401.)
HE WHO GRUDGES THE REWARD TO ANOTHER FORGETS THAT HE HIMSELF IS SAVED BY GRACE ALONE [EMPHASES SUPPLIED]. (IBID., P. 402.)**

**THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICANTHE LAST PASSAGE WE WILL CONSIDER FROM THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS IS THE STORY OF THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN FOUND IN LUKE 18:10-14. THIS IS PROBABLY THE MOST OBVIOUS OF ALL OF JESUS’ ILLUSTRATIONS OF SALVATION THROUGH JUSTIFYING GRACE (HE EXPLICITLY USES THE WORD “JUSTIFIED” TO REFER TO THE STATUS OF THE PENITENT PUBLICAN).
THE SETTING IS PRAYER TIME AT THE TEMPLE, AND A PHARISEE AND A PUBLICAN (A TAX COLLECTOR) ARE IN CONVERSATION WITH GOD. WHAT IS QUITE OBVIOUS IS THAT THE PHARISEE IS NOT ONLY IN CONVERSATION WITH GOD, BUT IT APPEARS THAT MOST OF THE CONVERSATION IS WITH HIMSELF (“HE PRAYED THUS WITH HIMSELF”). THE MOST OF HIS PRAYER TAKES THE FORM OF SELF-CONGRATULATORY, SPIRITUAL TRIUMPHALISM.
CAREFULLY NOTE THE STARK CONTRAST BETWEEN THE TWO. THE PHARISEE IS PROUD OF HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, BOTH WHAT HE AVOIDED (EXTORTION, INJUSTICE, ADULTERY) AND WHAT HE ACCOMPLISHED (FASTING AND TITHING). IN OTHER WORDS, HE FEELS QUITE SECURE IN HIS RELATIONSHIP TO GOD BECAUSE OF HIS MORALITY, RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES, AND FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP. NOW MOST CERTAINLY ALL OF THESE VIRTUES ARE COMMENDABLE! THE PROBLEM IS THAT THE ONE DOING THE COMMENDING IS THE PHARISEE HIMSELF!
THIS POINT BECOMES RATHER OBVIOUS WHEN THE PHARISEE’S ATTITUDE IS CONTRASTED WITH THAT OF THE PUBLICAN. THE TAX MAN BRINGS NOTHING TO GOD BUT HIS GREAT AND DESPERATE NEED WHICH IS EXPRESSED IN THE HUMILITY BORNE OF GENUINE SORROW FOR SIN (PENITENCE) AND PLEADINGS FOR THE MERCY OF GOD IN THE LIGHT OF HIS DESPERATE MORAL AND SPIRITUAL CONDITION.
THE INDISPUTABLE POINT OF THE STORY IS THIS: SINNERS (BOTH PHARISEES AND PUBLICANS) ARE “JUSTIFIED” NOT BY THEIR GOOD WORKS, BUT BY THE SHEER MERCY OF GOD. IT WAS THE PENITENT PUBLICAN, NOT THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS PHARISEE WHO “WENT DOWN TO HIS HOUSE JUSTIFIED” (VS. 14). IS IT FAIR TO SAY THAT THIS STORY STRONGLY IMPLIES THAT NONE OF THE WORKS OF SINFUL HUMANS COULD EVER FORM THE BASIS OF OUR ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD?**

**PAUL AND JUSTIFICATION**

**NOW LET’S TURN TO THE WRITINGS OF PAUL, THE APOSTOLIC EXPONENT OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH “PAR EXCELLENCE.”**

**BEFORE WE TURN TO THE MORE INVOLVED AND CLASSIC TEXTS IN ROMANS AND GALATIANS, WE WILL BRIEFLY CONSIDER TWO FAIRLY STRAIGHTFORWARD AND WELL-KNOWN PASSAGES: EPHESIANS 2:8-10 AND TITUS 3:4-7.**

**EPHESIANS 2:8-10THIS PASSAGE IS CERTAINLY ONE OF THE MOST OFTEN QUOTED SALVATION BY GRACE PASSAGES IN SCRIPTURE, AND ITS FAME IS JUSTLY DESERVED.
THE SOURCE OF SALVATION IS “GRACE;” THE MEANS BY WHICH IT IS RECEIVED IS “THROUGH FAITH.” THE MOST TELLING METAPHOR OF THE PASSAGE, HOWEVER, IS THE FACT THAT SALVATION IS A “GIFT,” NOT JUST ANY “GIFT,” BUT THE “GIFT OF GOD” ERUPTING OUT OF THE ABUNDANCE OF HIS “GRACE” (VS. 8)!
SO FAR WE HAVE LOOKED AT THE POSITIVE SIDE OF GOD’S GRACIOUS REDEMPTION. PAUL, HOWEVER, REFUSES TO LEAVE IT AT THE MERELY POSITIVE. HE FEELS COMPELLED TO TOSS IN A COUPLE OF VERY IMPORTANT NEGATIONS: SALVATION IS “NOT OF YOURSELVES” (IT IS NOT THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF SINNERS) AND IT IS “NOT OF WORKS.” WHY THESE NEGATIONS OF THE HUMAN CONTRIBUTION? PAUL IS VERY QUICK TO ANSWER, “LEST ANY MAN SHOULD BOAST” (VSS. 8, 9).
THE STARK IMPLICATION IS THAT A HUMAN-GENERATED SALVATION “OF WORKS” WOULD ENGENDER PRIDE BEFORE GOD. THE MARKED POINT OF THESE VERSES IS THAT GOD IS TO WISE TO ALLOW THIS TO TRANSPIRE. HIS WAY OF SALVATION WORKS ON THE PRINCIPLE OF HUMBLE, CLINGING FAITH, NOT “BOASTING” SELF-SUFFICIENCY. IN VIEW OF THE PERSISTENT PROCLIVITY OF HUMANS TO BOAST, IS IT ANY WONDER THAT GOD HAS COME UP WITH THE “FAITH ALONE” METHOD OF SALVATION SO THAT THE BLOATED “GLORY OF MAN COULD BE LAID IN THE DUST.”
TITUS 3:4-7ONCE AGAIN IN THIS PASSAGE PAUL LAYS OUT THE BASICS OF SALVATION THROUGH JUSTIFYING GRACE. THE SOURCE IS THE “MERCY” GENERATING “KINDNESS AND LOVE OF GOD OUR SAVIOUR” (VS. 4) WHICH IS COMMUNICATED TO SINNERS THROUGH “THE WASHING OF REGENERATION, AND RENEWING OF THE HOLY GHOST; WHICH HE SHED ON US ABUNDANTLY THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR SAVIOUR” (VSS. 5, 6).
THE BASIS, HOWEVER, OF THIS REGENERATING AND RENEWING WORK OF THE SPIRIT IS THE FACT THAT SINNERS CAN ONLY BE “SAVED” OR “JUSTIFIED BY HIS GRACE” (VS. 7), “NOT BY WORKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH WE HAVE DONE, BUT ACCORDING TO HIS MERCY” (VS. 5). ONCE MORE WE HAVE JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE RATHER CLEARLY QUALIFIED AS COMING THROUGH GRACE “ALONE,” AND PAUL’S KEY QUALIFIER IS THE PRIDE-KILLING PHRASE, “NOT BY WORKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH WE HAVE DONE.” THE ULTIMATE GOAL IS THAT PENITENT SINNERS “SHOULD BE MADE HEIRS ACCORDING TO THE HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE” (VS. 7).
I WOULD SUGGEST THAT PAUL IS MAKING IT ABUNDANTLY APPARENT THAT THERE IS SIMPLY NO WAY TO THE “HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE” EXCEPT THROUGH THE WAY OF GRACE ALONE. EVERY OTHER PATH EITHER LEADS TO DEATH-DEALING PRIDE OF HUMAN ACCOMPLISHMENT OR THE BLIGHTING DESPAIR BORN OF MORAL FAILURE.
ROMANS 3 AND 4THESE CHAPTERS CONTAIN PAUL’S MOST EXTENDED AND SYSTEMATIC EXPOSITION OF SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH ALONE (THOUGH GALATIANS 2 AND 3 PROBABLY EXHIBIT HIS MOST SUCCINCT AND EXPLICIT TREATMENT OF THE ISSUE). WE WILL NOT INDULGE IN AN EXTENDED INTERPRETATION OF ROMANS 3 AND 4, BUT WILL ONLY COVER THE EXPLICIT HIGHLIGHTS THAT DIRECTLY ADDRESS THE ISSUE AT HAND.
ROMANS 3. WE BEGIN WITH ROMANS 3:19, 20. IN THESE VERSES, PAUL IS CONCLUDING A RATHER EXTENDED PORTRAYAL OF THE SINFULNESS OF ALL HUMANITY (WHICH BEGAN IN 1:18) WITH THE CONCLUSION THAT “ALL THE WORLD” IS “GUILTY BEFORE GOD” (VS. 19). NOW THE NORMAL HUMAN RESPONSE TO SUCH A CONDEMNATION IS EITHER TO DENY THE CHARGES OR SEEK TO PAY THE APPROPRIATE FINE. BUT NOTICE WHAT PAUL SAYS. THERE IS SIMPLY NO WAY THAT YOU SINNERS HAVE THE RESOURCES TO PAY THE FINE; AND ON TOP OF THAT, PLEASE DON’T TRY TO WIGGLE OUT OF THE FACT THAT YOU ARE TRULY GUILTY. “THEREFORE BY THE DEEDS OF THE LAW THERE SHALL NO FLESH BE JUSTIFIED IN HIS SIGHT: FOR BY THE LAW IS THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN” (VS. 20). DOES THIS MEAN THAT THE SINNER’S CONDITION IS HOPELESS? OF COURSE NOT! WHAT PAUL IS DRIVING AT IS THAT HOPE IS NOT FOUND IN LAW RIGHTEOUSNESS, BUT ONLY THROUGH THE “MANIFESTATION” OF A “RIGHTEOUSNESS WITHOUT THE LAW” (VS. 21).
AND WHAT IS THIS “RIGHTEOUSNESS WITHOUT THE LAW”? IS IT A RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT DOES AWAY WITH THE LAW AS A MORAL STANDARD OR AN INSTRUMENT OF THE CONVICTION OF SIN? OF COURSE NOT (VS. 31). IT IS “THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD WHICH IS BY FAITH OF JESUS CHRIST UNTO ALL AND UPON ALL THEM THAT BELIEVE” (VS. 22). IN OTHER WORDS, SAVING, JUSTIFYING RIGHTEOUSNESS COMES TO THE SINNER THROUGH THE TRUSTING, APPROPRIATING FAITH OF THE PENITENT, NOT BY “DEEDS OF THE LAW” (VS. 28).
WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF THIS SALVATION? IT COMES “FREELY” FROM GOD AND IS GIVEN TO US “THROUGH THE REDEMPTION THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS” (VS. 24). SINNERS RECEIVE IT THROUGH “FAITH IN HIS BLOOD,” THE BLOOD OF THE “PROPITIATING” SACRIFICE OF CALVARY. THIS FAITH IN THE BLOOD EFFECTIVELY REMITS PAST “SINS,” AND THE SINNER STANDS BEFORE GOD JUSTIFIED BY FAITH (VSS. 25, 26). WHAT IS PAUL’S CONCLUSION? “THEREFORE WE CONCLUDE THAT A MAN IS JUSTIFIED BY FAITH WITHOUT THE DEEDS OF THE LAW” (VS. 28).
WHO IS THE MAN OF FAITH THAT IS JUSTIFIED? HE IS BOTH THE JEW AND THE GENTILE, SINCE “ALL HAVE SINNED AND COME SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD” (VS. 23; COMPARE VSS. 29 AND 30).\***

**\* WE WILL COME BACK TO VS. 23 A LITTLE LATER TO MORE CLOSELY ANALYZE THIS TREATMENT OF JUSTIFICATION. WE WILL DO THIS IN ORDER TO GIVE EVIDENCE THAT NOT ONLY DOES JUSTIFICATION COVER THE SINS OF THE PAST, BUT IT MUST CONSTANTLY COVER THE SIN OF THE SINNER EVERY STEP OF THE WAY IN THE NORMAL CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.**

**ROMANS 4.NOW THE NEXT ARGUMENT WHICH PAUL MAKES IN 4:1-11 IS NOTHING SHORT OF A STROKE OF ILLUSTRATIVE GENIUS. ONE OF HIS REPEATED ARGUMENTS HAS BEEN THAT HIS UNDERSTANDING OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE (“WITHOUT WORKS OF THE LAW”) IS NOT JUST HIS TEACHING, BUT THAT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT. IT IS NOT, HOWEVER, JUST ISOLATED PORTIONS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT WHICH TESTIFY TO “FAITH ALONE,” BUT SUCH TESTIMONY IS FOUND IN THE LAW (THE TORAH, THE FIRST FIVE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE), THE PROPHETS, AND ALSO IN THE PSALMS OF DAVID. IN OTHER WORDS, SALVATION BY FAITH ALONE IS GOD’S WAY PORTRAYED IN ALL THREE MAJOR SECTIONS OF THE JEWISH SCRIPTURES.
THIS PARTICULAR TYPE OF ARGUMENT WAS DESIGNED TO REACH OUT TO THE JEWS WHO WERE CONVINCED THAT THEY WERE SAVED BY THEIR GOOD WORKS OF THE LAW, BUT WHO TOOK GREAT PRIDE IN THE AUTHORITY OF THEIR SACRED, CANONICAL TEXTS. WHAT PAUL IS GOING TO DEMONSTRATE IS THAT IF YOU ACCEPT THE AUTHORITY AND TESTIMONY OF THE LAW, THE PROPHETS, AND THE PSALMS, YOU CANNOT CLING TO YOUR IDEAS OF SALVATION BY LAW.
SO HOW DOES PAUL PROCEED? HE TROTS OUT ABRAHAM AND DAVID AS PRIME EXHIBITS THAT SALVATION COMES BY FAITH ALONE, NOT BY WORKS OF THE LAW. HIS MAIN EXHIBIT, THOUGH, IS THE FAITH PILGRIMAGE OF ABRAHAM. DAVID IS SORT OF THROWN IN FOR GOOD MEASURE.
HERE WE HAVE AS WITNESSES TWO OF THE GREATEST FIGURES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT: ABRAHAM, THE FATHER OF THE RACE, AND DAVID, ISRAEL’S GREATEST KING. WHAT BETTER EXAMPLES COULD PAUL HAVE COME UP WITH?
THE ARGUMENT OF ROMANS 4.HERE IS HOW PAUL’S ARGUMENT IN CHAPTER 4 RUNS: HE RAISES THE QUESTION AS TO WHAT “ABRAHAM OUR FATHER AS PERTAINING TO THE FLESH” HAS FOUND WHEN IT COMES TO JUSTIFICATION (VS. 1). HIS FIRST ANSWER IS THAT IF ABRAHAM WAS “JUSTIFIED BY WORKS,” HE COULD WELL BOAST, “BUT NOT BEFORE GOD” (VS. 2). WHY IS THIS? BECAUSE THE LAW OF MOSES, IN GENESIS 15:6, PLAINLY TELLS US THAT ABRAHAM DID NOT DO WORKS OF THE LAW TO BE JUSTIFIED, BUT FOUND JUSTIFICATION THROUGH THE EXERCISE OF FAITH: “ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS COUNTED UNTO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (VS. 3). WHAT PAUL IS REALLY SAYING TO HIS JEWISH, LEGALISTIC OPPONENTS IS THAT THE PLAIN, EXPLICIT TESTIMONY OF THE LAW (THE FIRST FIVE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE) IS THAT SINNERS ARE NOT SAVED BY WORKS OF THE LAW, BUT BY FAITH.
LOGIZOMAI.ONE OF THE REALLY STRIKING ASPECTS OF THIS WHOLE EXPOSITION IN VERSES 3-11 IS THE REPEATED USE OF THE GREEK WORD LOGIZOMAI. IN THE KJV VERSION OF ROMANS 4, THIS WORD IS VARIOUSLY TRANSLATED EIGHT TIMES AS “COUNTED” (VSS. 3, 5), “RECKONED” (VSS. 4, 9, AND 10), AND “IMPUTE” (VSS. 6, 8, AND 11).
LOGIZOMAI IS A TERM TAKEN FROM THE WORLD OF BUSINESS, LEGALITY, AND ACCOUNTING. ANY OF THESE VARIOUS TRANSLATIONS ARE POSSIBLE (COUNTED, RECKONED, AND IMPUTED); BUT ALL OF THE CONCEPTS INHERENT IN THIS WORD MAKE CRYSTAL CLEAR THE IDEA OF AN OBJECTIVE KEEPING OF THE BOOKS, EITHER FINANCIALLY OR LEGALLY, AND HAVE NO REFERENCE TO THE DEEDS OF THE BELIEVING SINNER.
THIS IS VERY STRIKING SUPPORT FOR JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH, NOT BY WORKS OF THE LAW. EIGHT TIMES, THIS GREEK WORD IS USED TO DENOTE SOMETHING THAT GOD DOES OBJECTIVELY FOR THE SINNER, NOT WHAT THE SINNER DOES FOR GOD OR WHAT GOD DOES THROUGH THE SINNER TO ENABLE THE SINNER TO GAIN SOME SORT OF RIGHTEOUS STANDING.
DAVID’S TESTIMONY.BEFORE WE GO TO THE CLIMAX OF PAUL’S ARGUMENT CONCERNING ABRAHAM, LET’S PAUSE TO NOTE HIS USE OF DAVID AS A WITNESS TO JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH. IN SUPPORT OF HIS CONTENTION THAT “FAITH” NOT “WORKS” IS WHAT BRINGS ABOUT SAVING “RIGHTEOUSNESS,” PAUL CITES PSALMS 32:1, 2 TO THE EFFECT THAT “GOD IMPUTETH RIGHTEOUSNESS WITHOUT WORKS” (VS. 6): “BLESSED ARE THEY WHOSE INIQUITIES ARE FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS ARE COVERED. BLESSED IS THE MAN TO WHOM THE LORD WILL NOT IMPUTE SIN” (VSS. 7 AND 8). IN OTHER WORDS, NOT ONLY DOES THE LAW OF MOSES (IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS 15:6) SUPPORT JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH THROUGH AN “ACCOUNTED” RIGHTEOUSNESS, BUT THE PSALMS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT ALSO SUPPORT THE CONCEPT. THROUGH THE WORDS OF DAVID (IN PS. 32:1, 2), IT IS DECLARED THAT SIN IS NOT “IMPUTED” TO THE SINNER AS HIS “INIQUITIES ARE FORGIVEN” AND HER “SINS ARE COVERED.”
THE CULMINATION OF THE ABRAHAM EXHIBIT OF JUSTIFYING FAITH.NOW BACK TO THE CULMINATING POINT OF THE ABRAHAM EXHIBIT OR ARGUMENT FOR JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE:
ONCE MORE, LET’S BE REMINDED THAT THE TARGET OF THIS ARGUMENT IS THE LEGALISTIC JEW WHO CLAIMS THAT SINNERS ARE JUSTIFIED BY “WORKS OF THE LAW,” NOT BY FAITH ALONE. LET’S ALSO BE REMINDED THAT THE MAJOR CONTROVERSY GOING ON IN PAUL’S MINISTRY WAS WHETHER THE GENTILE CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY WERE TO BE REQUIRED TO SUBMIT TO ADULT, MALE CIRCUMCISION. THIS ISSUE WILL CERTAINLY GET YOUR ATTENTION, ESPECIALLY IF YOU ARE AN ADULT MALE CONTEMPLATING CHURCH MEMBERSHIP!
PAUL SETS THE TABLE FOR HIS ARGUMENT IN ROMANS 4 WITH A COUPLE OF POINTEDLY PHRASED, LEADING QUESTIONS: DOES THIS BLESSING OF JUSTIFICATION COME “UPON THE CIRCUMCISION [JEWS] ONLY,” OR IS IT FOR THE “UNCIRCUMCISION [GENTILES] ALSO?” (VS. 9). WHEN WAS ABRAHAM “RECKONED” AS HAVING “RIGHTEOUSNESS” THROUGH “FAITH,” WHEN “HE WAS IN CIRCUMCISION OR IN UNCIRCUMCISION” (VS. 10)?
THE ANSWER THAT PAUL BRINGS FORWARD IS SIMPLY A DEVASTATING USE OF THE SELF-EVIDENT FACTS OF THE HISTORICAL RECORD OF THE STORY OF ABRAHAM RECORDED IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS: “NOT IN CIRCUMCISION, BUT IN UNCIRCUMCISION” (VS. 10). IN OTHER WORDS, ABRAHAM WAS JUSTIFIED BEFORE HE EVER DID ANY “WORKS” OF THE LAW.
PAUL, HOWEVER, DOES NOT LEAVE IT THERE WITH THE NAKED FACTS OF THE HISTORICAL RECORD. LIKE ANY GOOD DEBATER, HE GOES ON TO DRIVE THE POINT HOME WITH DEVASTATING FORCE TO THE VERY HEART OF HIS OPPONENT’S ARGUMENT: “HE [ABRAHAM] RECEIVED THE SIGN OF CIRCUMCISION, A SEAL OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE FAITH WHICH HE HAD YET BEING UNCIRCUMCISED” (VS. 11). TO PUT IT PLAINLY, ABRAHAM WAS ALREADY DECLARED TO BE RIGHTEOUS THROUGH FAITH BEFORE HE WAS CIRCUMCISED AND THERE WAS NO NEED FOR HIM TO DO WORKS OF THE LAW TO WIN THE FAVOR OF GOD. CERTAINLY “WORKS” ARE IMPORTANT AS “MARKS” AND “SEALS” OF THE GENUINENESS OF SAVING FAITH, BUT THEY ARE NEVER THE GROUNDS OR THE BASIS OF SUCH A SAVING STANDING.
GALATIANS 2 AND 3THESE GALATIANS CHAPTERS ARE VERY SIMILAR TO ROMANS 3 AND 4. IN FACT, MANY COMMENTATORS SUGGEST THAT ROMANS AND GALATIANS WERE WRITTEN AT THE SAME TIME DURING A WINTER LAYOVER AT CORINTH. IT WAS MOST LIKELY A CRISIS AMONG THE BELIEVERS IN GALATIA WHICH PROVOKED ARGUMENTS EXPOUNDED IN BOTH OF THESE LETTERS.
THE GALATIANS ISSUE.THE CRISIS WAS PROVOKED BY CHRISTIAN JEWS DEMANDING THAT GENTILE CONVERTS BE CIRCUMCISED. PAUL’S RESPONSE IN THE GALATIANS LETTER WAS PAINED TO THE POINT OF INDIGNANCE AT SUCH AN OUTRAGEOUS REQUIREMENT. IN FACT, HE FELT SO STRONGLY ABOUT THIS MATTER THAT HE WAS WILLING TO SAY THAT THE VERY VALIDITY OF THE GOSPEL WAS AT STAKE. SPACE DOES NOT PERMIT AN EXTENDED INTERPRETATION, BUT PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING EXPLICIT TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE.
GALATIANS 2:16.“A MAN IS NOT JUSTIFIED BY 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 WORKS OF THE LAW: FOR BY THE WORKS OF THE LAW SHALL NO FLESH BE JUSTIFIED.”
ALL DOWN THROUGH THE CENTURIES, MANY HAVE BEEN UNCOMFORTABLE WITH PAUL’S STARK CONTENTION IN THESE VERSES. THE DISCOMFORT ALWAYS SEEMS TO ARISE OUT OF THE SUGGESTION THAT JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE, WITHOUT “WORKS OF THE LAW,” WILL DO AWAY WITH THE LAW AND LEAD TO ATTITUDES OF “CHEAP GRACE”—THE IDEA THAT THE REDEEMED ARE FREE FROM OBEDIENCE AND CAN INDULGE IN ANY LIFESTYLE THAT THEY JOLLY WELL PLEASE TO LIVE OUT. BUT ALL THAT PAUL IS TRYING TO ARGUE IS THAT “WORKS OF THE LAW” WILL NEVER EFFECT OR BRING ABOUT EITHER THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN OR FORM THE MERITORIOUS BASIS OF ANY SAVING RELATIONSHIP TO A RIGHTEOUS AND JUST GOD.
GALATIANS 3:11.PAUL ONCE AGAIN IS VERY EXPLICIT “THAT NO MAN IS JUSTIFIED BY THE LAW IN THE SIGHT OF GOD . . . FOR, THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.”
ARE BELIEVERS EVER BEYOND THE NEED FOR JUSTIFYING GRACE?NOW BEFORE WE LEAVE PAUL’S EXPOSITIONS IN ROMANS 3 AND 4 AND GALATIANS 2 AND 3, THERE IS ONE OTHER ISSUE THAT NEEDS TO BE MADE CLEAR.
MAYBE WE COULD LAY OUT THIS ISSUE MOST CLEARLY WITH THREE QUESTIONS. (1) WHEN WE SPEAK OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE, ARE WE SPEAKING ONLY OF GOD’S FORGIVENESS OF THE SINS OF THE PRE-CONVERSION LIFE? LET’S TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER. (2) DOES JUSTIFICATION DEAL WITH THE SINS IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER, IN ADDITION TO THEIR PRE-CONVERSION FAILINGS? OR (3)DOES JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALSO INVOLVE SOMETHING THAT MUST BE AVAILABLE TO BELIEVERS TO GIVE THEM A CONSTANT STANDING OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, FEEBLE AND FAILING THOUGH THEY MIGHT BE?
I WOULD ARGUE THAT SCRIPTURE GIVES STRONGLY SUGGESTIVE EVIDENCE THAT JUSTIFYING GRACE NEEDS TO BE AN ESSENTIAL BLESSING GRANTED TO THE BELIEVER ALL THE WAY TO THE DAY OF GLORIFICATION—THE DAY WHEN WE WILL FINALLY BE TAKEN OUT OF THE CONTEXT OF TEMPTATION AND SINFUL NATURE. IN OTHER WORDS, NOT ONLY DO WE NEED PAST SINS TO BE FORGIVEN (BOTH PRE- AND POST-CONVERSION), BUT WE NEED TO BE RECKONED AS PERFECTLY RIGHTEOUS EVERY STEP OF THE WAY BY THE MERITS OF CHRIST WHICH ARE OBJECTIVELY MINISTERED TO US THROUGH CHRIST’S INTERCESSORY WORK AS OUR CONSTANTLY ADVOCATING HIGH PRIEST IN HEAVEN. IS THERE BIBLICAL SUPPORT FOR THIS CONCEPT?
ROMANS 3:23.I WOULD SUGGEST THAT THE BEST EVIDENCE IS IN ROMANS 3:23: “FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND COME SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD.” PLEASE RECALL THAT BEGINNING IN 3:19, PAUL HAS COMMENCED A SUSTAINED ARGUMENT IN SUPPORT OF SALVATION BY FAITH ALONE, NOT BY WORKS OF THE LAW. THE REASON FOR JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH AND NOT BY WORKS ARISES OUT OF THE GREAT NEED OF THE SINNER. ALL SINNERS ARE DEBASED NOT ONLY IN TERMS OF THE “GODLESSNESS” OF ACTIONS, BUT ALSO BY THE SINFULNESS OF THEIR CORRUPT NATURES.
THERE ARE NOT ONLY THE PAST SINS TO BE DEALT WITH, BUT ALSO THE PROBLEM OF A CONTINUOUS OOZING OF ALL SORTS OF DEPRAVITY OUT OF THE VERY PORES OF OUR SIN-RIDDEN NATURES. HE CLIMAXES THIS LINE OF ARGUMENT IN 3:23. LET’S EXPLORE THIS VERY CAREFULLY.
WHEN PAUL SAYS THAT “ALL HAVE SINNED,” HE IS OBVIOUSLY REFERRING TO THE SINS OF THE PAST. HE USES HERE THE GREEK PAST TENSE OF TOTALLY COMPLETED ACTION (CALLED AORIST TENSE). IN OTHER WORDS, THESE ARE THE ACTIONS THAT WERE DONE IN THE COMPLETED PAST OF THE SINNER’S LIFE.
NOW EVERY HONEST CHRISTIAN WILL CERTAINLY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT BEFORE THEY WERE CONVERTED AND SINCE THEY WERE CONVERTED THEY HAVE SINNED; THAT IS, THEY HAVE SINNED IN THE PAST. AND THESE SINS NEED TO BE COVERED BY THE JUSTIFYING MERITS OF CHRIST THROUGH FORGIVENESS. BUT THE REALLY STICKY QUESTION IS THIS: WHAT ABOUT THE SINFUL DEFECTS THAT WE ARE STILL DOGGED WITH IN THE PRESENT DISTRESS? IS THERE ANY PERSON WHO IS COMING CLOSE TO CHRIST WHO CAN REALLY CLAIM TO BE SINLESS IN BEHAVIOR AND ABSOLUTELY PURE IN THOUGHT AND MOTIVE?
PAUL SPEAKS TO THIS PREDICAMENT IN A VERY REALISTIC MANNER. NOT ONLY HAVE WE “ALL SINNED,” BUT WE ALSO “COME SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD.” WHAT IS THIS LATTER PHRASE REALLY SAYING? IN THE ORIGINAL GREEK, THIS PHRASE IS LITERALLY SAYING SOMETHING LIKE THIS: “WE ARE ALL CONTINUALLY, IN THE PRESENT MOMENT, ACTUALLY COMING SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD.”\* THE VERB TRANSLATED “COME SHORT” IS IN THE GREEK PRESENT ACTIVE INDICATIVE TENSE. THIS IS THE TENSE OF PRESENT, CONTINUOUS ACTIONS TAKING PLACE MOMENT BY MOMENT IN A PERSON’S LIFE.**

**\* THIS IS WHIDDEN’S INTERPRETATIVE PARAPHRASE, BUT PLEASE DON’T WORRY, I HAVE NO INTENTION OF PRODUCING ANOTHER PARAPHRASED VERSION OF THE BIBLE. I AM ONLY TRYING TO MAKE THE MEANING CLEAR.**

**NOW IN THE ROUGH AND TUMBLE OF EVERYDAY REALISTIC EXPERIENCE, WHAT IS THE ANSWER TO SUCH A CONDITION? IF THE SALVATION EXPERIENCE IS TO BE UNDERSTOOD IN PRIMARILY RELATIONAL NOT BEHAVIORAL TERMS, PAUL MUST BE COMMUNICATING SOMETHING LIKE THIS: JESUS, AS JUSTIFYING LORD, IS CONSTANTLY RECKONING OR ACCOUNTING THOSE WHO TRUST IN HIM AS PERFECT THROUGH THE MERITS OF HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS—MOMENT BY MOMENT.
GALATIANS 3:6-14.THESE VERSES SEEM TO PARALLEL ROMANS 3:23 AND LEAVE THE STRONG IMPLICATION THAT THE REASON WHY WE CANNOT BE JUSTIFIED BY WORKS OF THE LAW IS THAT SUCH WORKS WOULD NEVER BE PERFECT ENOUGH TO GET US OR KEEP US IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. THUS SAVING FAITH MUST HAVE AS ITS BASIS OR FOUNDATION THE ACCOUNTED MERITS OF CHRIST THAT ARE APPROPRIATED BY TRUST—FAITH ALONE.
ONCE AGAIN, LET’S BE REMINDED THAT THE BURDEN OF THIS PASSAGE IS THE “FAITH” METHOD OF SALVATION VERSUS THE “WORKS OF THE LAW” APPROACH. THE IMPLICATION OF THE CONSTANT “COMING SHORT” IN BEHAVIOR SEEMS TO BE INHERENT IN THE REASONING OF VS. 10: “FOR AS MANY AS ARE OF THE WORKS OF THE LAW ARE UNDER THE CURSE: FOR IT IS WRITTEN, CURSED IS EVERY ONE THAT CONTINUETH NOT IN ALL THINGS WHICH ARE WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW TO DO THEM.”
REFLECT FOR A MOMENT ON THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF PAUL’S CONTENTION IN THIS VERSE. CAN ANY ONE OF YOU, IN YOUR PRESENT CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE, TRULY SAY THAT YOU ARE CONTINUALLY DOING “ALL THINGS WHICH ARE WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW” (VS. 10)? I DO BELIEVE THAT THE ANSWER IS SELF-EVIDENT. THEN IT IS LITTLE WONDER THAT PAUL HASTENS TO SAY “THAT NO MAN IS JUSTIFIED BY THE LAW” SINCE “IT IS EVIDENT” THAT “THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH” (VS. 11).
I JOHN 1:6-2:1.THIS PASSAGE, ALONG WITH PAUL’S COMMENTS IN ROMANS 3 AND GALATIANS 3, SEEMS TO MOST OBVIOUSLY IMPLY THE SAME TRUTH. WHILE CHRISTIANS NEED TO BE WALKING IN THE “LIGHT” AND AVOIDING THE PATHS OF “DARKNESS,” THERE ARE TWO SOMEWHAT ANOMALOUS THINGS TO REMEMBER. FIRST OF ALL, WHEN BELIEVERS WALK IN THE “LIGHT,” THEY HAVE THE BLESSED PRIVILEGES OF “FELLOWSHIP ONE WITH ANOTHER” AND THEY MAY KNOW THAT THE “BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST . . . CLEANSETH US FROM ALL SIN” (VS. 7). THEY, HOWEVER, ARE CAUTIONED NEVER TO SAY “WE HAVE NO SIN” LEST THEY BE FOUND IN A STATE OF PROFOUND SELF-DECEPTION (VSS. 8, 10).
IN THE MIDDLE OF THESE TWO ANOMALOUS, ALMOST SEEMINGLY CONTRADICTORY STATES, BELIEVERS ARE REMINDED THAT THEY NEED TO BE IN A STATE OF CONSTANT PENITENCE. SUCH A FRAME OF MIND WILL BE EVIDENCED BY CONFESSION OF SIN AND THE CONSTANT ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS AND CLEANSING FROM ALL “UNRIGHTEOUSNESS” (VS. 9). DOES THIS CLEANSING REFER ONLY TO THE STATE OF BEING FORGIVEN, OR DOES IT ALSO REFER TO ACTUAL CLEANSING AWAY OF SINFUL HABIT PATTERNS? IN OTHER WORDS, IS IT ONE OR THE OTHER, OR IS IT BOTH? I WOULD SUGGEST THAT THE CONTEXT OF VS. 9 SUGGESTS THAT IT REFERS TO BOTH, BUT WITH THE STRONG IMPLICATION THAT THE CLEANSING OF “HABIT PATTERNS” AND OUR SINFUL NATURES IS NEVER ABSOLUTE THIS SIDE OF GLORIFICATION. IF VICTORY OVER SINFUL NATURE AND HABIT PATTERNS IS ABSOLUTE, WHY THEN DOES JOHN WARN SUCH BELIEVERS TO AVOID CLAIMS THAT THEY “HAVE NO SIN” (VS. 8) OR THAT THEY “HAVE NOT SINNED” (VS. 10)?
BELIEVERS CAN CERTAINLY STAND COMPLETELY CLEANSED OF PAST SINS THROUGH FORGIVENESS, BUT THEY DO NOT SEEM TO BE ABLE TO STAND SINLESS IN CHARACTER OR NATURE. JOHN SEEMS TO SUGGEST THAT IN SOME SENSE OUR DAILY MEAT AND DRINK WILL BE PENITENCE. IN THE FIRST VERSE OF CHAPTER 2, JOHN GIVES FURTHER SUPPORT FOR THIS CONCLUSION: “THESE THINGS WRITE I UNTO YOU, THAT YE SIN NOT.” JOHN IS ABSOLUTELY CLEAR THAT THERE IS NO ROOM FOR SIN IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER. BUT THEN HE STRONGLY IMPLIES THAT THERE WILL BE SOME TYPE OF DEFICIENCIES AS CHRISTIANS GROW IN GRACE: “AND IF ANY MAN SIN, WE HAVE AN ADVOCATE WITH THE FATHER, JESUS CHRIST THE RIGHTEOUS.” HERE JOHN IS REMINDING THE BELIEVERS THAT THERE WILL BE INEVITABLE MESS-UPS, BUT THEY NEED NOT DESPAIR SINCE THERE IS ONE WHO ADVOCATES WITH THE FATHER FOR THEM.
WHAT ARE WE TO MAKE OF JOHN’S SOMEWHAT ANOMALOUS COUNSEL TO THE BELIEVERS? I WOULD SUGGEST THAT WHAT JOHN IS HERE REFERRING TO IS A SET OF BASIC ATTITUDES THAT SHOULD TYPIFY BELIEVERS; BUT HE IS ALSO BEING VERY REALISTIC THAT EVEN WITH THE BEST ATTITUDE OF FAITH, THERE WILL BE WHAT ELLEN WHITE CALLS “UNAVOIDABLE DEFICIENCIES” IN THE GROWTH EXPERIENCE OF THE BELIEVERS.
WHAT JOHN SEEMS TO BE SUGGESTING IN THESE VERSES IS A DISTINCTION BETWEEN WILLFUL, PREMEDITATED, HIGH-HANDED SINS AND THOSE OF A MORE ACCIDENTAL NATURE. BOTH TYPES OF SIN ARE CLEARLY SIN, BUT THE LATTER ARE NOT NEARLY AS DEADLY AS THE FORMER. AND FOR THE LATTER TYPE OF SINS (WHAT I CALL THE “BLIND-SIDE” HITS), JESUS IS CONSTANTLY RECKONING THE BELIEVERS AS ACCOUNTED PERFECT AND CLEANSED. THIS CONCEPT OF CHRIST AS OUR CONSTANTLY INTERCEDING ADVOCATE, MINISTERING THE MERITS OF HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR BELIEVERS, IS THE CORE FOUNDATION OF NOT ONLY JOHN’S UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE, BUT ALSO ELLEN WHITE’S.
IT IS TO ELLEN WHITE’S UNDERSTANDING OF THE SUBJECT OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE THAT WE WILL TURN OUR ATTENTION IN LESSON 14.**

Justification by Faith Alone?

**REVIEW OF KEY PERSPECTIVES ON SALVATION**

**LET US REMIND OURSELVES OF A NUMBER OF KEY PERSPECTIVES THAT WE NEED TO KEEP IN MIND AS WE PONDER THE ISSUE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE.
FIRST, LET’S REMEMBER THAT WHEN WE RECEIVE JESUS AND ARE UNITED TO HIM BY FAITH, WE RECEIVE ALL OF HIS BLESSINGS. WE NOT ONLY RECEIVE HIM AS CONVERTING AND REGENERATING LORD, BUT WE ALSO RECEIVE HIM AS OUR ADVOCATE BEFORE THE FATHER. IN THIS ROLE, JESUS IS CONTINUALLY MAKING FORGIVENESS AND NEW LEGAL STANDING AVAILABLE TO THE TRUSTING, PENITENT SINNER.
SECOND, I WOULD STRONGLY SUGGEST THAT IF WE ARE TO REALLY GET A GRIP ON JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH IN ALL OF ITS RADICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE, WE NEED TO CAREFULLY PONDER THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST FOR US. IN OTHER WORDS, I AM SUGGESTING THAT THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE IS CLOSELY TIED TO THE WHOLE CONCEPT OF CHRIST OUR SACRIFICE WHO BORE THE PENALTY FOR OUR SIN, AS OUR SUBSTITUTE, IN ORDER TO SATISFY DIVINE JUSTICE. JUSTIFICATION IS VERY MUCH A REDEMPTIVE CONCEPT THAT IS DRAWN FROM THE WORLD OF LAW COURTS AND MATTERS OF LEGAL STANDING. IT IS NO ACCIDENT THAT SOME OF THE MOST FORCEFUL BIBLICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE PENAL/SUBSTITUTION/ SATISFACTION VIEW OF THE ATONEMENT IS FOUND IN SETTINGS WHERE THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION IS GIVEN CLASSIC EXPRESSION (ROMANS 3, GALATIANS 3, II CORINTHIANS 5).
HAVING SAID THIS, WE ALSO NEED TO REMEMBER THAT THE METAPHORS OF LEGALITY, AS IMPORTANT AS THEY ARE, DO NOT EXHAUST THE THEME OF RECONCILIATION. LET US ALWAYS KEEP IN MIND THAT LEGAL METAPHORS NEED TO BE COMPLEMENTED BY FAMILY, FRIENDSHIP, BUSINESS, AND COVENANT METAPHORS.
THIRD, JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH IS THE WORK OF GOD THAT IS CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH CONVERSION AND REGENERATION. ONE CANNOT BE FULLY CONVERTED OR REGENERATED WITHOUT JUSTIFICATION. THUS THE EXPERIENCE OF THE NEW BIRTH IS INTIMATELY BOUND UP WITH GOD’S FORGIVING GRACE AND CHRIST’S MINISTRY AS THE SINNER’S CONSTANTLY INTERCEDING PRIEST/ADVOCATE WHO RECKONS US TO BE NO LONGER DESERVING OF DEATH. THE BASIS OF THIS RECKONING IS THAT CHRIST NOT ONLY DIED OUR DEATH, BUT THAT HE LIVED A PERFECT LIFE AND HIS PERFECT OBEDIENCE IS ALSO RECKONED AS OURS.**

**CONVERSION DOES NOT CAUSE JUSTIFICATION**

**CONVERSION DOES NOT CAUSE JUSTIFICATION, BUT PREPARES THE WAY FOR IT. WHEN THE SINNER’S ATTITUDES TOWARDS GOD AND SIN ARE CHANGED TO PENITENCE AND TRUST (AS OPPOSED TO PRIDE AND SELF-DEPENDENCE), THEN THE SINNER IS PRIMED TO EXERCISE FAITH IN DIVINE FORGIVENESS AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF A NEW STANDING “IN CHRIST.” REGENERATION DOES NOT CAUSE ONE TO BE JUSTIFIED, BUT JUSTIFICATION PREPARES THE WAY BY PROVIDING THE BASIS FOR GOD’S LOVING ACCEPTANCE. IT IS THIS ACCEPTANCE WHICH ENABLES US TO MOVE FORWARD IN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AND SERVICE. IF ANYTHING, JUSTIFICATION IS THE CAUSE OF SANCTIFICATION. THERE IS A VERY REAL SENSE IN WHICH JUSTIFICATION MUST PRECEDE SANCTIFICATION, AND GOD’S ACCEPTANCE PROVIDES THE CONCRETE, LOVING MOTIVATION FOR THE SINNER TO SERVE AND OBEY GOD.**

**FOUNDATIONAL IMPORTANCE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE**

**NOW LET’S GET MORE PRECISE. WHAT EXACTLY DO WE MEAN BY THE PHRASE “JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE”? WHEN CHRISTIANS, ESPECIALLY PROTESTANT AND SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHRISTIANS, USE THIS TERM, THEY HAVE TRADITIONALLY WANTED TO RATHER CAREFULLY NUANCE THEIR DEFINITION. AND I MUST CONFESS THAT I FEEL THE NEED TO BE QUITE PRECISE IN THIS MATTER.
WHAT FOLLOWS IS (1) A RATHER PRECISE DEFINITION OF JUSTIFICATION, (2) THE BIBLICAL SUPPORT FOR IT, (3) THE ELLEN WHITE SUPPORT FOR IT, AND (4) THE SUMMATION OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE DOCTRINE FOR CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE, THAT IS TO SAY—SPIRITUAL FORMATION. THE LATTER ASPECT IS ESPECIALLY CRITICAL AS WE NEED TO EXPRESS THE DYNAMIC INTERRELATIONSHIP OF JUSTIFICATION TO SANCTIFICATION WITH SOME CARE. TO PUT IT MORE SIMPLY, FORGIVENESS AND LEGAL STANDING NEED TO BE CAREFULLY COORDINATED WITH THE WHOLE PROCESS OF REGENERATIVE CHARACTER CHANGE.
PUT ANOTHER WAY, WE NEED TO BE NOT ONLY CLEAR ON THE WHAT OF JUSTIFICATION, BUT ALSO THE SO WHAT. NOT ONLY DO WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IT IS, BUT ALSO WHY IT IS SO IMPORTANT THAT IT BE WHAT IT IS.
I ALERT THE STUDENT: THIS ISSUE IS VERY FOUNDATIONAL AND CENTRAL TO ANY GENUINE GROWTH IN GRACE. IF WE MESS UP ON THIS VERY BASIC ISSUE, WE ARE IN GRAVE DANGER OF MESSING UP THE WHOLE OF OUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF SALVATION. THIS ISSUE IS TRULY AT THE BEDROCK. IF WE DON’T SET THE HOUSE OF FAITH ON THE SECURE FOOTINGS OF JUSTIFYING GRACE, THE WHOLE SUPERSTRUCTURE OF SANCTIFYING GRACE CAN EASILY COME TUMBLING DOWN INTO A HEAP OF EITHER DESPAIR OR SELF-RIGHTEOUS PHARISAISM.**

A Definition of Justification by Faith Alone

**THE CORE MEANING COMMUNICATED BY THESE IMPORTANT WORDS GOES LIKE THIS:**

**JUSTIFICATION**

**THE EXPRESSION “JUSTIFICATION” COMES FROM THE WORLD OF THE LAW COURTS AND SEEKS TO EXPRESS FOUNDATIONAL ASPECTS OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE IN TERMS OF LEGALITY AND BUSINESS DEALING (ESPECIALLY THE ACCOUNTING SIDE OF BUSINESS). IT DEALS WITH MORAL AND LEGAL DEMANDS AND HOW SUCH DEMANDS ARE MET OR SATISFIED. THE KEY TERMS INVOLVED IN EXPRESSING THE CONCEPT OF JUSTIFICATION ARE “FORGIVE,” “ACCOUNT,” “RECKON,” AND “IMPUTE.”**

**FAITH ALONE**

**THE TWO OTHER KEY EXPRESSIONS ASSOCIATED WITH BIBLICAL JUSTIFICATION ARE “FAITH” AND “ALONE.” ALL OF THESE EXPRESSIONS NEED TO BE CAREFULLY EXPLAINED. FORGIVEN AND RECKONED PERFECT
WHAT CHRISTIANS HAVE WANTED TO COMMUNICATE BY THE CONCEPT OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH IS ALONG THE FOLLOWING LINES:
THE FORGIVENESS AND NEW LEGAL STANDING ACCORDED THE PENITENT SINNER IS TOTALLY A FREE GIFT OF GOD’S GRACE RECEIVED BY FAITH ALONE; IT IS NOT ANYTHING THAT THE SINNER CAN EARN BY ANY OF HIS OR HER GOOD WORKS. GOD, FOR CHRIST’S SAKE, FORGIVES AND RECKONS THE TRUSTING, PENITENT SINNER TO BE NO LONGER CONDEMNED BY THE SINS OF THE PAST (THE WORK OF FORGIVENESS) AND TO BE CONSTANTLY ACCOUNTED AS PERFECT IN CHRIST.
IT COULD ALL BE PUT ANOTHER WAY: FORGIVENESS RECKONS THE SINS OF THE PAST TO BE COVERED OR PURGED AWAY BY THE PERFECT OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST IN HIS ACTIVE OBEDIENCE, AND THE DEBT OF THE PENALTY TO BE SATISFIED BY CHRIST’S PASSIVE OBEDIENCE IN DYING AN ATONING DEATH ON THE CROSS. WE ARE JUSTIFIED BY CHRIST’S PERFECT OBEDIENCE WHICH IS PUT IN PLACE OF OUR FAILURE, AND HIS DEATH WHICH WAS PUT IN PLACE OF OUR DESERVED DEATH. IN OTHER WORDS, WE ARE NO LONGER UNDER THE CONDEMNATION OF THE LAW AND SIN AS CHRIST BORE OUR JUST DESSERTS AND HAS GIVEN US HIS COMPLETE VICTORY OVER FAILURE.
SOME HAVE CALLED THIS “VICARIOUS” OR “IMPUTED” “RIGHTEOUSNESS.” VICARIOUS SIMPLY MEANS ONE TAKING THE PLACE OF ANOTHER. IN THIS SENSE, CHRIST’S PERFECT LIFE AND SACRIFICE ARE PUT IN PLACE OF OUR FAILURE AND ITS JUST REWARDS.**

**FAITH**

**NOW WHAT ABOUT “FAITH”? AS WAS MENTIONED IN THE PREVIOUS LESSON, THE TERM FAITH REFERS NOT SO MUCH TO THE MENTAL ASSENT OF MERE INTELLECTUAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT, BUT TO THE WHOLE IDEA OF PERSONAL TRUST. THIS IS AN UNDERSTANDING OF TRUST WHICH TAKES GOD’S OFFER AT FACE VALUE AND PERSONALLY APPROPRIATES THE BLESSINGS OF FORGIVENESS AND NEW, PERFECT LEGAL STANDING. IN OTHER WORDS, IT IS ACTUALLY TRUSTING THAT CHRIST LIVED AND DIED FOR ME AND ACCEPTING THE FACT I AM NO LONGER UNDER CONDEMNATION.
MANY ILLUSTRATIONS COME TO MIND BUT ONE WILL SUFFICE. IF SOMEONE GIVES ME A CHECK FOR TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS, THE CHECK WILL DO ME NO GOOD UNLESS I TRUST THE PERSON WHO GAVE IT TO ME ENOUGH TO ACTUALLY (1) REACH OUT AND TAKE THE CHECK, (2) BELIEVE THAT THEY REALLY WILL STAND BEHIND THE CHECK AS A LEGITIMATE GUARANTOR (THE OLD WORD WAS “SURETY”), AND (3) GO TO THE BANK, CASH THE CHECK, AND TAKE POSSESSION OF THE TEN GRAND. THIS IS WHAT RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH IS ABOUT—WE TRUSTINGLY TAKE THE CHECK IN THE BELIEF THAT THE MONEY IS THERE, AND THEN ACTUALLY TAKE POSSESSION OF THE CASH.**

**ALONE**

**THE LAST CONCEPT, EXPRESSED BY THE WORD “ALONE,” IS THE ONE THAT IS PROBABLY THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL. WE NEED TO EXPRESS THE MEANING INHERENT IN THIS CONCEPT WITH SOME CARE, EVEN CAUTION. QUITE POSSIBLY THE MOST IMPORTANT BIBLICAL METAPHOR WHICH THIS CONCEPT GROWS OUT OF IS THE IDEA THAT SALVATION IS A “GIFT” (EPHESIANS 2:8, 9).
WHAT THE BIBLE SEEKS TO COMMUNICATE WITH THIS “GIFT” METAPHOR IS THAT THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING THAT ANY SINNER HAS DONE OR COULD EVER DO TO WIN OR PURCHASE THE FORGIVENESS AND PERFECT LEGAL STANDING THAT WE RECEIVE “IN CHRIST.” OBEDIENCE TO BOTH CEREMONIAL AND MORAL REQUIREMENTS OF THE LAW, THE GIVING OF ALMS AND THE RETURNING OF TITHES, THE PRACTICE OF FASTING, VIGILS, PRAYERS, CHRISTIAN SERVICE, EVANGELISTIC WITNESSING, AND WORSHIP WILL NEVER SAVE THE SINNER. THEY ARE GOOD, NECESSARY, AND EVEN FORM THE CONDITION OF SALVATION, BUT THEY NEVER SERVE AS THE MERITORIOUS BASIS OF OUR RECONCILIATION WITH GOD. IN FACT, ALL OF THESE THINGS CAN EVEN BECOME A POSITIVE CURSE IF WE THINK THAT THEY WILL CONTRIBUTE TO OUR RECONCILING ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD. IT IS THIS IDEA WHICH FORMS THE BASIS FOR THE AWFUL CURSE OF SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS, WHAT PAUL CALLS “BOASTING” BEFORE GOD.
LET’S BE VERY BLUNT AND PLAIN ABOUT THIS ISSUE. NOTHING THAT ANY PENITENT SINNER COULD EVER DO (EITHER IN COMING TO CHRIST, OR STAYING IN CHRIST) WILL EVER PUT GOD IN DEBT TO HIM OR HER. IT IS ONLY THROUGH THE GRACIOUS GIFT OF THE ACCOUNTED MERITS OF CHRIST’S PERFECT LIFE AND ATONING DEATH THAT SINNERS ARE RECONCILED TO GOD. THIS IS THE CORE MEANING COMMUNICATED BY THE “FAITH ALONE” CONCEPT.**

**FAITH ALONE IS NEVER ALONE!**

**NOW MOST CERTAINLY SUCH SAVING FAITH WILL NEVER BE “ALONE”—IT WILL ALWAYS BE ACCOMPANIED BY THE EVIDENCE OF GOOD WORKS; THE “GOOD WORKS,” HOWEVER, ARE NOT WHAT EFFECTS RECONCILIATION. ONLY THE MERITS OF CHRIST’S ACTIVE OBEDIENCE IN PERFECTLY KEEPING THE LAW FOR US, AND HIS PASSIVE OBEDIENCE IN DYING FOR SINNERS, HAVE PROVIDED THE MERITORIOUS GIFT THAT WILL SAVE.
FAITH ALONE IS THE ROOT OF ALL PERSONAL SALVATION AND RECONCILIATION TO GOD. GOOD WORKS ARE THE INEVITABLE, EVIDENCING FRUIT OF ANY GENUINE MANIFESTATION OF FAITH ALONE. IF THERE IS NO ROOT, THERE WILL BE NO REAL FRUIT. IF THERE IS NOT FRUIT, IT IS A CINCH THAT THE ROOT IS DEAD.
IS THIS CONCEPT BIBLICAL AND IS IT CONFIRMED BY ELLEN WHITE?**

The Bible and Justification by Faith Alone

**SPACE DOES NOT PERMIT AN EXHAUSTIVE EXAMINATION OF THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE, BUT WE WILL DEAL WITH THE BEST AND CLEAREST TEXTS ON THE SUBJECT.**

**JESUS AND JUSTIFICATION**

**FIRST OF ALL, WHAT DID JESUS SAY ABOUT JUSTIFICATION? JESUS DID NOT EXPOUND THIS ISSUE WITH THE SYSTEMATIC, TECHNICAL PRECISION THAT IS MORE TYPICAL OF PAUL. JESUS SEEMS TO EXPRESS THE DYNAMIC IN MORE NARRATIVE WAYS.
TWO KEY PARABLES AND ONE STORY SEEM TO EXPRESS IT BEST.**

**THE “WEDDING FEAST”
THE FIRST PARABLE IS THE “WEDDING FEAST” RECORDED IN MATTHEW 22:1-14. I INVITE THE STUDENT TO READ THE PASSAGE. NOTE THAT THE PARABLE REACHES ITS CLIMAX WHEN THE FRUSTRATED KING GIVES UP ON ALL OF THE “SOMEBODIES” WHO HAD RUDELY REJECTED HIS WEDDING INVITATION. IT IS THEN THAT HE ORDERS HIS SERVANTS TO GO OUT INTO THE HIGHWAYS AND HEDGES AND ROUND UP ALL OF THE “NOBODIES,” “BOTH BAD AND GOOD.” THUS THE WEDDING FEAST WAS FURNISHED WITH GUESTS.
ONE CAN EASILY IMAGINE ALL OF THE SURPRISE AND JOY MANIFESTED BY THIS RAFFISH ASSORTMENT OF LOSERS WHO NOW FIND THEMSELVES PARTICIPATING IN A ROYAL WEDDING PARTY. IT IS, HOWEVER, IN THE MIDST OF THE FESTIVITIES THAT THE PARABLE TAKES A VERY DISTURBING AND SHOCKING TURN.
THE KING ARRIVES AT THE FESTIVITIES TO CHECK OUT THE “GUESTS” TO MAKE SURE THAT EVERYONE IS PROPERLY ATTIRED FOR THE OCCASION. HE FINDS ONE WHO HAS PRESUMPTUOUSLY REFUSED THE OFFERED WEDDING GARMENT. ALTHOUGH THE TEXT OF JESUS’ NARRATIVE DOES NOT EXPLICITLY SAY THAT ALL HAD BEEN OFFERED A FREE WEDDING GARMENT, THE POWERFUL IMPLICATION IS THAT THEY HAD. HOW WOULD IT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE FOR ALL OF THESE “NOBODIES” TO AFFORD A GARMENT FIT FOR A ROYAL WEDDING FEAST?
MOST CERTAINLY THIS “WEDDING GARMENT” IS A SYMBOL OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST THAT IS FREELY OFFERED TO ALL WHO ANSWER HIS SALVATION INVITATION (CF. ISAIAH 61:10 AND REVELATION 19:8). MOST CERTAINLY THIS IS A VIVID METAPHOR FOR THE FORGIVENESS AND PERFECT STANDING THAT THE LORD OFFERS WITHOUT PAYMENT ON THE PART OF THE DESTITUTE, SINFUL “NOBODY.”
THE “HIRED LABORERS”
THE SECOND PARABLE IS KNOWN AS THE “HIRED LABORERS” AND IS FOUND IN MATTHEW 20:1-16. ONCE AGAIN I URGE THE STUDENT TO GIVE THIS REMARKABLE STORY A CAREFUL READING. LET’S BRIEFLY REVIEW THE SETTING. IT IS THE TIME OF THE GRAPE HARVEST. GRAPES ARE NOT AT ALL LIKE TOMATOES WHEN IT COMES TO HARVESTING. TOMATOES CAN BE HARVESTED GREEN AND WILL RIPEN ON THE WAY TO MARKET; GRAPES, HOWEVER, CAN ONLY BE HARVESTED WHEN THEY ARE RIPE ON THE VINE. IF PICKED TOO EARLY OR TOO LATE, THEY SIMPLY ROT. THEY MUST BE GATHERED IN AT EXACTLY THE RIGHT TIME. THUS THE “HOUSEHOLDER” IS VERY ANXIOUS TO GET THE JOB DONE. HE HEADS OUT TO THE MARKETPLACE WITH A SENSE OF URGENCY TO HIRE HARVESTERS.
THE STORY THEN PROCEEDS WITH THE MASTER GOING TO THE MARKETPLACE AND HIRING WORKERS “EARLY IN THE MORNING” AND AGREEING TO PAY THEM “A PENNY” TO WORK THE WHOLE DAY. THE SITUATION, HOWEVER, MUST HAVE REALLY BEEN “RIPE” AND AT THE “THIRD HOUR” (ROUGHLY NINE IN THE MORNING), THE “SIXTH,” “NINTH” AND EVEN THE “ELEVENTH” HOURS HE GOES TO THE “MARKETPLACE” AND HIRES MORE WORKERS WITH THE PROMISE THAT HE WILL PAY “WHATSOEVER IS RIGHT.”
THINGS MUST HAVE GONE QUITE WELL, THAT IS, UNTIL THE END OF THE DAY AND THE TIME TO PAY THE WORKERS. IT IS THEN THAT THE PARABLE TAKES A MOST STARTLING TURN—EVERYBODY GETS PAID THE SAME NO MATTER HOW LONG OR HARD THEY HAVE WORKED!
WHAT ARE WE TO MAKE OF THIS SEEMING INJUSTICE?
FIRST OF ALL, THE PARABLE IS NOT A CLASSIC EXAMPLE OF FAIR EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES; I AM QUITE CONFIDENT THAT ANY LABOR ORGANIZER WOULD CONSIDER THIS “HOUSEHOLDER” A PRIME TARGET. THE OBVIOUS POINT OF THE PARABLE IS TWOFOLD:**

1. **IN GOD’S KINGDOM THE REDEEMED’S SALVATION STATUS IS NOT BASED ON WORKS—EVERYBODY IS PAID THE SAME NO MATTER HOW LITTLE OR MUCH THEY WORKED; SALVATION IS BY A LIVING RELATIONSHIP TO THE “HOUSEHOLDER,” NOT BY WORKS.**
2. **FAR FROM BEING SAVED BY WORKS, THE NEXT OBVIOUS POINT IS THAT IT IS SIMPLY A GREAT PRIVILEGE TO WORK IN THE VINEYARD OF THE LORD AND THIS IS THE SECOND TRUTH THAT THE PEOPLE WHO WORKED ALL DAY MISSED. IT IS PART OF GOD’S GRACE TO SHARE LABOR WITH HIM IN HIS VINEYARD, AND IN REALITY, THE FIRST HOUR WORKERS WERE THE ONES THAT WERE MORE BLESSED AND PRIVILEGED, NOT THE ELEVENTH HOUR WORKERS WHO ONLY GOT TO SHARE ONE HOUR WITH THE LORD IN HIS SAVING LABORS.**

**REGARDING THIS PARABLE’S LESSON ABOUT SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH ALONE, ELLEN WHITE’S COMMENTS ARE RIGHT TO THE POINT:**

**[GOD’S] REWARD IS GIVEN NOT ACCORDING TO OUR MERIT BUT ACCORDING TO HIS OWN PURPOSE. (ELLEN WHITE, CHRIST’S OBJECT LESSONS, PP. 397.)
[PEOPLE] WOULD THINK THEY COULD DO SOMETHING TOWARD EARNING A PLACE IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. THEY WOULD IMAGINE THAT WHEN THEY HAD MADE CERTAIN ADVANCEMENT, THE LORD WOULD COME IN TO HELP THEM. THUS THERE WOULD BE AN ABUNDANCE OF SELF AND LITTLE OF JESUS. (IBID., P. 400.)
THE REWARD IS NOT OF WORKS, LEST ANY MAN SHOULD BOAST: BUT IT IS ALL OF GRACE. (IBID., P. 401.)
HE WHO GRUDGES THE REWARD TO ANOTHER FORGETS THAT HE HIMSELF IS SAVED BY GRACE ALONE [EMPHASES SUPPLIED]. (IBID., P. 402.)**

**THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICANTHE LAST PASSAGE WE WILL CONSIDER FROM THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS IS THE STORY OF THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN FOUND IN LUKE 18:10-14. THIS IS PROBABLY THE MOST OBVIOUS OF ALL OF JESUS’ ILLUSTRATIONS OF SALVATION THROUGH JUSTIFYING GRACE (HE EXPLICITLY USES THE WORD “JUSTIFIED” TO REFER TO THE STATUS OF THE PENITENT PUBLICAN).
THE SETTING IS PRAYER TIME AT THE TEMPLE, AND A PHARISEE AND A PUBLICAN (A TAX COLLECTOR) ARE IN CONVERSATION WITH GOD. WHAT IS QUITE OBVIOUS IS THAT THE PHARISEE IS NOT ONLY IN CONVERSATION WITH GOD, BUT IT APPEARS THAT MOST OF THE CONVERSATION IS WITH HIMSELF (“HE PRAYED THUS WITH HIMSELF”). THE MOST OF HIS PRAYER TAKES THE FORM OF SELF-CONGRATULATORY, SPIRITUAL TRIUMPHALISM.
CAREFULLY NOTE THE STARK CONTRAST BETWEEN THE TWO. THE PHARISEE IS PROUD OF HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, BOTH WHAT HE AVOIDED (EXTORTION, INJUSTICE, ADULTERY) AND WHAT HE ACCOMPLISHED (FASTING AND TITHING). IN OTHER WORDS, HE FEELS QUITE SECURE IN HIS RELATIONSHIP TO GOD BECAUSE OF HIS MORALITY, RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES, AND FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP. NOW MOST CERTAINLY ALL OF THESE VIRTUES ARE COMMENDABLE! THE PROBLEM IS THAT THE ONE DOING THE COMMENDING IS THE PHARISEE HIMSELF!
THIS POINT BECOMES RATHER OBVIOUS WHEN THE PHARISEE’S ATTITUDE IS CONTRASTED WITH THAT OF THE PUBLICAN. THE TAX MAN BRINGS NOTHING TO GOD BUT HIS GREAT AND DESPERATE NEED WHICH IS EXPRESSED IN THE HUMILITY BORNE OF GENUINE SORROW FOR SIN (PENITENCE) AND PLEADINGS FOR THE MERCY OF GOD IN THE LIGHT OF HIS DESPERATE MORAL AND SPIRITUAL CONDITION.
THE INDISPUTABLE POINT OF THE STORY IS THIS: SINNERS (BOTH PHARISEES AND PUBLICANS) ARE “JUSTIFIED” NOT BY THEIR GOOD WORKS, BUT BY THE SHEER MERCY OF GOD. IT WAS THE PENITENT PUBLICAN, NOT THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS PHARISEE WHO “WENT DOWN TO HIS HOUSE JUSTIFIED” (VS. 14). IS IT FAIR TO SAY THAT THIS STORY STRONGLY IMPLIES THAT NONE OF THE WORKS OF SINFUL HUMANS COULD EVER FORM THE BASIS OF OUR ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD?**

**PAUL AND JUSTIFICATION**

**NOW LET’S TURN TO THE WRITINGS OF PAUL, THE APOSTOLIC EXPONENT OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH “PAR EXCELLENCE.”
BEFORE WE TURN TO THE MORE INVOLVED AND CLASSIC TEXTS IN ROMANS AND GALATIANS, WE WILL BRIEFLY CONSIDER TWO FAIRLY STRAIGHTFORWARD AND WELL-KNOWN PASSAGES: EPHESIANS 2:8-10 AND TITUS 3:4-7.**

**EPHESIANS 2:8-10THIS PASSAGE IS CERTAINLY ONE OF THE MOST OFTEN QUOTED SALVATION BY GRACE PASSAGES IN SCRIPTURE, AND ITS FAME IS JUSTLY DESERVED.
THE SOURCE OF SALVATION IS “GRACE;” THE MEANS BY WHICH IT IS RECEIVED IS “THROUGH FAITH.” THE MOST TELLING METAPHOR OF THE PASSAGE, HOWEVER, IS THE FACT THAT SALVATION IS A “GIFT,” NOT JUST ANY “GIFT,” BUT THE “GIFT OF GOD” ERUPTING OUT OF THE ABUNDANCE OF HIS “GRACE” (VS. 8)!
SO FAR WE HAVE LOOKED AT THE POSITIVE SIDE OF GOD’S GRACIOUS REDEMPTION. PAUL, HOWEVER, REFUSES TO LEAVE IT AT THE MERELY POSITIVE. HE FEELS COMPELLED TO TOSS IN A COUPLE OF VERY IMPORTANT NEGATIONS: SALVATION IS “NOT OF YOURSELVES” (IT IS NOT THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF SINNERS) AND IT IS “NOT OF WORKS.” WHY THESE NEGATIONS OF THE HUMAN CONTRIBUTION? PAUL IS VERY QUICK TO ANSWER, “LEST ANY MAN SHOULD BOAST” (VSS. 8, 9).
THE STARK IMPLICATION IS THAT A HUMAN-GENERATED SALVATION “OF WORKS” WOULD ENGENDER PRIDE BEFORE GOD. THE MARKED POINT OF THESE VERSES IS THAT GOD IS TO WISE TO ALLOW THIS TO TRANSPIRE. HIS WAY OF SALVATION WORKS ON THE PRINCIPLE OF HUMBLE, CLINGING FAITH, NOT “BOASTING” SELF-SUFFICIENCY. IN VIEW OF THE PERSISTENT PROCLIVITY OF HUMANS TO BOAST, IS IT ANY WONDER THAT GOD HAS COME UP WITH THE “FAITH ALONE” METHOD OF SALVATION SO THAT THE BLOATED “GLORY OF MAN COULD BE LAID IN THE DUST.”
TITUS 3:4-7ONCE AGAIN IN THIS PASSAGE PAUL LAYS OUT THE BASICS OF SALVATION THROUGH JUSTIFYING GRACE. THE SOURCE IS THE “MERCY” GENERATING “KINDNESS AND LOVE OF GOD OUR SAVIOUR” (VS. 4) WHICH IS COMMUNICATED TO SINNERS THROUGH “THE WASHING OF REGENERATION, AND RENEWING OF THE HOLY GHOST; WHICH HE SHED ON US ABUNDANTLY THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR SAVIOUR” (VSS. 5, 6).
THE BASIS, HOWEVER, OF THIS REGENERATING AND RENEWING WORK OF THE SPIRIT IS THE FACT THAT SINNERS CAN ONLY BE “SAVED” OR “JUSTIFIED BY HIS GRACE” (VS. 7), “NOT BY WORKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH WE HAVE DONE, BUT ACCORDING TO HIS MERCY” (VS. 5). ONCE MORE WE HAVE JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE RATHER CLEARLY QUALIFIED AS COMING THROUGH GRACE “ALONE,” AND PAUL’S KEY QUALIFIER IS THE PRIDE-KILLING PHRASE, “NOT BY WORKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH WE HAVE DONE.” THE ULTIMATE GOAL IS THAT PENITENT SINNERS “SHOULD BE MADE HEIRS ACCORDING TO THE HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE” (VS. 7).
I WOULD SUGGEST THAT PAUL IS MAKING IT ABUNDANTLY APPARENT THAT THERE IS SIMPLY NO WAY TO THE “HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE” EXCEPT THROUGH THE WAY OF GRACE ALONE. EVERY OTHER PATH EITHER LEADS TO DEATH-DEALING PRIDE OF HUMAN ACCOMPLISHMENT OR THE BLIGHTING DESPAIR BORN OF MORAL FAILURE.
ROMANS 3 AND 4THESE CHAPTERS CONTAIN PAUL’S MOST EXTENDED AND SYSTEMATIC EXPOSITION OF SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH ALONE (THOUGH GALATIANS 2 AND 3 PROBABLY EXHIBIT HIS MOST SUCCINCT AND EXPLICIT TREATMENT OF THE ISSUE). WE WILL NOT INDULGE IN AN EXTENDED INTERPRETATION OF ROMANS 3 AND 4, BUT WILL ONLY COVER THE EXPLICIT HIGHLIGHTS THAT DIRECTLY ADDRESS THE ISSUE AT HAND.
ROMANS 3. WE BEGIN WITH ROMANS 3:19, 20. IN THESE VERSES, PAUL IS CONCLUDING A RATHER EXTENDED PORTRAYAL OF THE SINFULNESS OF ALL HUMANITY (WHICH BEGAN IN 1:18) WITH THE CONCLUSION THAT “ALL THE WORLD” IS “GUILTY BEFORE GOD” (VS. 19). NOW THE NORMAL HUMAN RESPONSE TO SUCH A CONDEMNATION IS EITHER TO DENY THE CHARGES OR SEEK TO PAY THE APPROPRIATE FINE. BUT NOTICE WHAT PAUL SAYS. THERE IS SIMPLY NO WAY THAT YOU SINNERS HAVE THE RESOURCES TO PAY THE FINE; AND ON TOP OF THAT, PLEASE DON’T TRY TO WIGGLE OUT OF THE FACT THAT YOU ARE TRULY GUILTY. “THEREFORE BY THE DEEDS OF THE LAW THERE SHALL NO FLESH BE JUSTIFIED IN HIS SIGHT: FOR BY THE LAW IS THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN” (VS. 20). DOES THIS MEAN THAT THE SINNER’S CONDITION IS HOPELESS? OF COURSE NOT! WHAT PAUL IS DRIVING AT IS THAT HOPE IS NOT FOUND IN LAW RIGHTEOUSNESS, BUT ONLY THROUGH THE “MANIFESTATION” OF A “RIGHTEOUSNESS WITHOUT THE LAW” (VS. 21).
AND WHAT IS THIS “RIGHTEOUSNESS WITHOUT THE LAW”? IS IT A RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT DOES AWAY WITH THE LAW AS A MORAL STANDARD OR AN INSTRUMENT OF THE CONVICTION OF SIN? OF COURSE NOT (VS. 31). IT IS “THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD WHICH IS BY FAITH OF JESUS CHRIST UNTO ALL AND UPON ALL THEM THAT BELIEVE” (VS. 22). IN OTHER WORDS, SAVING, JUSTIFYING RIGHTEOUSNESS COMES TO THE SINNER THROUGH THE TRUSTING, APPROPRIATING FAITH OF THE PENITENT, NOT BY “DEEDS OF THE LAW” (VS. 28).
WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF THIS SALVATION? IT COMES “FREELY” FROM GOD AND IS GIVEN TO US “THROUGH THE REDEMPTION THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS” (VS. 24). SINNERS RECEIVE IT THROUGH “FAITH IN HIS BLOOD,” THE BLOOD OF THE “PROPITIATING” SACRIFICE OF CALVARY. THIS FAITH IN THE BLOOD EFFECTIVELY REMITS PAST “SINS,” AND THE SINNER STANDS BEFORE GOD JUSTIFIED BY FAITH (VSS. 25, 26). WHAT IS PAUL’S CONCLUSION? “THEREFORE WE CONCLUDE THAT A MAN IS JUSTIFIED BY FAITH WITHOUT THE DEEDS OF THE LAW” (VS. 28).
WHO IS THE MAN OF FAITH THAT IS JUSTIFIED? HE IS BOTH THE JEW AND THE GENTILE, SINCE “ALL HAVE SINNED AND COME SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD” (VS. 23; COMPARE VSS. 29 AND 30).\***

**\* WE WILL COME BACK TO VS. 23 A LITTLE LATER TO MORE CLOSELY ANALYZE THIS TREATMENT OF JUSTIFICATION. WE WILL DO THIS IN ORDER TO GIVE EVIDENCE THAT NOT ONLY DOES JUSTIFICATION COVER THE SINS OF THE PAST, BUT IT MUST CONSTANTLY COVER THE SIN OF THE SINNER EVERY STEP OF THE WAY IN THE NORMAL CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.**

32 mins ago

*ROMANS 4.NOW THE NEXT ARGUMENT WHICH PAUL MAKES IN 4:1-11 IS NOTHING SHORT OF A STROKE OF ILLUSTRATIVE GENIUS. ONE OF HIS REPEATED ARGUMENTS HAS BEEN THAT HIS UNDERSTANDING OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE (“WITHOUT WORKS OF THE LAW”) IS NOT JUST HIS TEACHING, BUT THAT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT. IT IS NOT, HOWEVER, JUST ISOLATED PORTIONS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT WHICH TESTIFY TO “FAITH ALONE,” BUT SUCH TESTIMONY IS FOUND IN THE LAW (THE TORAH, THE FIRST FIVE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE), THE PROPHETS, AND ALSO IN THE PSALMS OF DAVID. IN OTHER WORDS, SALVATION BY FAITH ALONE IS GOD’S WAY PORTRAYED IN ALL THREE MAJOR SECTIONS OF THE JEWISH SCRIPTURES.*
*THIS PARTICULAR TYPE OF ARGUMENT WAS DESIGNED TO REACH OUT TO THE JEWS WHO WERE CONVINCED THAT THEY WERE SAVED BY THEIR GOOD WORKS OF THE LAW, BUT WHO TOOK GREAT PRIDE IN THE AUTHORITY OF THEIR SACRED, CANONICAL TEXTS. WHAT PAUL IS GOING TO DEMONSTRATE IS THAT IF YOU ACCEPT THE AUTHORITY AND TESTIMONY OF THE LAW, THE PROPHETS, AND THE PSALMS, YOU CANNOT CLING TO YOUR IDEAS OF SALVATION BY LAW.*
*SO HOW DOES PAUL PROCEED? HE TROTS OUT ABRAHAM AND DAVID AS PRIME EXHIBITS THAT SALVATION COMES BY FAITH ALONE, NOT BY WORKS OF THE LAW. HIS MAIN EXHIBIT, THOUGH, IS THE FAITH PILGRIMAGE OF ABRAHAM. DAVID IS SORT OF THROWN IN FOR GOOD MEASURE.*
*HERE WE HAVE AS WITNESSES TWO OF THE GREATEST FIGURES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT: ABRAHAM, THE FATHER OF THE RACE, AND DAVID, ISRAEL’S GREATEST KING. WHAT BETTER EXAMPLES COULD PAUL HAVE COME UP WITH?*
*THE ARGUMENT OF ROMANS 4.HERE IS HOW PAUL’S ARGUMENT IN CHAPTER 4 RUNS: HE RAISES THE QUESTION AS TO WHAT “ABRAHAM OUR FATHER AS PERTAINING TO THE FLESH” HAS FOUND WHEN IT COMES TO JUSTIFICATION (VS. 1). HIS FIRST ANSWER IS THAT IF ABRAHAM WAS “JUSTIFIED BY WORKS,” HE COULD WELL BOAST, “BUT NOT BEFORE GOD” (VS. 2). WHY IS THIS? BECAUSE THE LAW OF MOSES, IN GENESIS 15:6, PLAINLY TELLS US THAT ABRAHAM DID NOT DO WORKS OF THE LAW TO BE JUSTIFIED, BUT FOUND JUSTIFICATION THROUGH THE EXERCISE OF FAITH: “ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS COUNTED UNTO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (VS. 3). WHAT PAUL IS REALLY SAYING TO HIS JEWISH, LEGALISTIC OPPONENTS IS THAT THE PLAIN, EXPLICIT TESTIMONY OF THE LAW (THE FIRST FIVE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE) IS THAT SINNERS ARE NOT SAVED BY WORKS OF THE LAW, BUT BY FAITH.*
*LOGIZOMAI.ONE OF THE REALLY STRIKING ASPECTS OF THIS WHOLE EXPOSITION IN VERSES 3-11 IS THE REPEATED USE OF THE GREEK WORD LOGIZOMAI. IN THE KJV VERSION OF ROMANS 4, THIS WORD IS VARIOUSLY TRANSLATED EIGHT TIMES AS “COUNTED” (VSS. 3, 5), “RECKONED” (VSS. 4, 9, AND 10), AND “IMPUTE” (VSS. 6, 8, AND 11).*
*LOGIZOMAI IS A TERM TAKEN FROM THE WORLD OF BUSINESS, LEGALITY, AND ACCOUNTING. ANY OF THESE VARIOUS TRANSLATIONS ARE POSSIBLE (COUNTED, RECKONED, AND IMPUTED); BUT ALL OF THE CONCEPTS INHERENT IN THIS WORD MAKE CRYSTAL CLEAR THE IDEA OF AN OBJECTIVE KEEPING OF THE BOOKS, EITHER FINANCIALLY OR LEGALLY, AND HAVE NO REFERENCE TO THE DEEDS OF THE BELIEVING SINNER.*
*THIS IS VERY STRIKING SUPPORT FOR JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH, NOT BY WORKS OF THE LAW. EIGHT TIMES, THIS GREEK WORD IS USED TO DENOTE SOMETHING THAT GOD DOES OBJECTIVELY FOR THE SINNER, NOT WHAT THE SINNER DOES FOR GOD OR WHAT GOD DOES THROUGH THE SINNER TO ENABLE THE SINNER TO GAIN SOME SORT OF RIGHTEOUS STANDING.*
*DAVID’S TESTIMONY.BEFORE WE GO TO THE CLIMAX OF PAUL’S ARGUMENT CONCERNING ABRAHAM, LET’S PAUSE TO NOTE HIS USE OF DAVID AS A WITNESS TO JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH. IN SUPPORT OF HIS CONTENTION THAT “FAITH” NOT “WORKS” IS WHAT BRINGS ABOUT SAVING “RIGHTEOUSNESS,” PAUL CITES PSALMS 32:1, 2 TO THE EFFECT THAT “GOD IMPUTETH RIGHTEOUSNESS WITHOUT WORKS” (VS. 6): “BLESSED ARE THEY WHOSE INIQUITIES ARE FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS ARE COVERED. BLESSED IS THE MAN TO WHOM THE LORD WILL NOT IMPUTE SIN” (VSS. 7 AND 8). IN OTHER WORDS, NOT ONLY DOES THE LAW OF MOSES (IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS 15:6) SUPPORT JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH THROUGH AN “ACCOUNTED” RIGHTEOUSNESS, BUT THE PSALMS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT ALSO SUPPORT THE CONCEPT. THROUGH THE WORDS OF DAVID (IN PS. 32:1, 2), IT IS DECLARED THAT SIN IS NOT “IMPUTED” TO THE SINNER AS HIS “INIQUITIES ARE FORGIVEN” AND HER “SINS ARE COVERED.”*
*THE CULMINATION OF THE ABRAHAM EXHIBIT OF JUSTIFYING FAITH.NOW BACK TO THE CULMINATING POINT OF THE ABRAHAM EXHIBIT OR ARGUMENT FOR JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE:*
*ONCE MORE, LET’S BE REMINDED THAT THE TARGET OF THIS ARGUMENT IS THE LEGALISTIC JEW WHO CLAIMS THAT SINNERS ARE JUSTIFIED BY “WORKS OF THE LAW,” NOT BY FAITH ALONE. LET’S ALSO BE REMINDED THAT THE MAJOR CONTROVERSY GOING ON IN PAUL’S MINISTRY WAS WHETHER THE GENTILE CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY WERE TO BE REQUIRED TO SUBMIT TO ADULT, MALE CIRCUMCISION. THIS ISSUE WILL CERTAINLY GET YOUR ATTENTION, ESPECIALLY IF YOU ARE AN ADULT MALE CONTEMPLATING CHURCH MEMBERSHIP!*
*PAUL SETS THE TABLE FOR HIS ARGUMENT IN ROMANS 4 WITH A COUPLE OF POINTEDLY PHRASED, LEADING QUESTIONS: DOES THIS BLESSING OF JUSTIFICATION COME “UPON THE CIRCUMCISION [JEWS] ONLY,” OR IS IT FOR THE “UNCIRCUMCISION [GENTILES] ALSO?” (VS. 9). WHEN WAS ABRAHAM “RECKONED” AS HAVING “RIGHTEOUSNESS” THROUGH “FAITH,” WHEN “HE WAS IN CIRCUMCISION OR IN UNCIRCUMCISION” (VS. 10)?*
*THE ANSWER THAT PAUL BRINGS FORWARD IS SIMPLY A DEVASTATING USE OF THE SELF-EVIDENT FACTS OF THE HISTORICAL RECORD OF THE STORY OF ABRAHAM RECORDED IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS: “NOT IN CIRCUMCISION, BUT IN UNCIRCUMCISION” (VS. 10). IN OTHER WORDS, ABRAHAM WAS JUSTIFIED BEFORE HE EVER DID ANY “WORKS” OF THE LAW.*
*PAUL, HOWEVER, DOES NOT LEAVE IT THERE WITH THE NAKED FACTS OF THE HISTORICAL RECORD. LIKE ANY GOOD DEBATER, HE GOES ON TO DRIVE THE POINT HOME WITH DEVASTATING FORCE TO THE VERY HEART OF HIS OPPONENT’S ARGUMENT: “HE [ABRAHAM] RECEIVED THE SIGN OF CIRCUMCISION, A SEAL OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE FAITH WHICH HE HAD YET BEING UNCIRCUMCISED” (VS. 11). TO PUT IT PLAINLY, ABRAHAM WAS ALREADY DECLARED TO BE RIGHTEOUS THROUGH FAITH BEFORE HE WAS CIRCUMCISED AND THERE WAS NO NEED FOR HIM TO DO WORKS OF THE LAW TO WIN THE FAVOR OF GOD. CERTAINLY “WORKS” ARE IMPORTANT AS “MARKS” AND “SEALS” OF THE GENUINENESS OF SAVING FAITH, BUT THEY ARE NEVER THE GROUNDS OR THE BASIS OF SUCH A SAVING STANDING.*
*GALATIANS 2 AND 3THESE GALATIANS CHAPTERS ARE VERY SIMILAR TO ROMANS 3 AND 4. IN FACT, MANY COMMENTATORS SUGGEST THAT ROMANS AND GALATIANS WERE WRITTEN AT THE SAME TIME DURING A WINTER LAYOVER AT CORINTH. IT WAS MOST LIKELY A CRISIS AMONG THE BELIEVERS IN GALATIA WHICH PROVOKED ARGUMENTS EXPOUNDED IN BOTH OF THESE LETTERS.*
*THE GALATIANS ISSUE.THE CRISIS WAS PROVOKED BY CHRISTIAN JEWS DEMANDING THAT GENTILE CONVERTS BE CIRCUMCISED. PAUL’S RESPONSE IN THE GALATIANS LETTER WAS PAINED TO THE POINT OF INDIGNANCE AT SUCH AN OUTRAGEOUS REQUIREMENT. IN FACT, HE FELT SO STRONGLY ABOUT THIS MATTER THAT HE WAS WILLING TO SAY THAT THE VERY VALIDITY OF THE GOSPEL WAS AT STAKE. SPACE DOES NOT PERMIT AN EXTENDED INTERPRETATION, BUT PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING EXPLICIT TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE.*
*GALATIANS 2:16.“A MAN IS NOT JUSTIFIED BY 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 WORKS OF THE LAW: FOR BY THE WORKS OF THE LAW SHALL NO FLESH BE JUSTIFIED.”*
*ALL DOWN THROUGH THE CENTURIES, MANY HAVE BEEN UNCOMFORTABLE WITH PAUL’S STARK CONTENTION IN THESE VERSES. THE DISCOMFORT ALWAYS SEEMS TO ARISE OUT OF THE SUGGESTION THAT JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE, WITHOUT “WORKS OF THE LAW,” WILL DO AWAY WITH THE LAW AND LEAD TO ATTITUDES OF “CHEAP GRACE”—THE IDEA THAT THE REDEEMED ARE FREE FROM OBEDIENCE AND CAN INDULGE IN ANY LIFESTYLE THAT THEY JOLLY WELL PLEASE TO LIVE OUT. BUT ALL THAT PAUL IS TRYING TO ARGUE IS THAT “WORKS OF THE LAW” WILL NEVER EFFECT OR BRING ABOUT EITHER THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN OR FORM THE MERITORIOUS BASIS OF ANY SAVING RELATIONSHIP TO A RIGHTEOUS AND JUST GOD.*
*GALATIANS 3:11.PAUL ONCE AGAIN IS VERY EXPLICIT “THAT NO MAN IS JUSTIFIED BY THE LAW IN THE SIGHT OF GOD . . . FOR, THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.”*
*ARE BELIEVERS EVER BEYOND THE NEED FOR JUSTIFYING GRACE?NOW BEFORE WE LEAVE PAUL’S EXPOSITIONS IN ROMANS 3 AND 4 AND GALATIANS 2 AND 3, THERE IS ONE OTHER ISSUE THAT NEEDS TO BE MADE CLEAR.*
*MAYBE WE COULD LAY OUT THIS ISSUE MOST CLEARLY WITH THREE QUESTIONS. (1) WHEN WE SPEAK OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE, ARE WE SPEAKING ONLY OF GOD’S FORGIVENESS OF THE SINS OF THE PRE-CONVERSION LIFE? LET’S TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER. (2) DOES JUSTIFICATION DEAL WITH THE SINS IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER, IN ADDITION TO THEIR PRE-CONVERSION FAILINGS? OR (3)DOES JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALSO INVOLVE SOMETHING THAT MUST BE AVAILABLE TO BELIEVERS TO GIVE THEM A CONSTANT STANDING OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, FEEBLE AND FAILING THOUGH THEY MIGHT BE?*
*I WOULD ARGUE THAT SCRIPTURE GIVES STRONGLY SUGGESTIVE EVIDENCE THAT JUSTIFYING GRACE NEEDS TO BE AN ESSENTIAL BLESSING GRANTED TO THE BELIEVER ALL THE WAY TO THE DAY OF GLORIFICATION—THE DAY WHEN WE WILL FINALLY BE TAKEN OUT OF THE CONTEXT OF TEMPTATION AND SINFUL NATURE. IN OTHER WORDS, NOT ONLY DO WE NEED PAST SINS TO BE FORGIVEN (BOTH PRE- AND POST-CONVERSION), BUT WE NEED TO BE RECKONED AS PERFECTLY RIGHTEOUS EVERY STEP OF THE WAY BY THE MERITS OF CHRIST WHICH ARE OBJECTIVELY MINISTERED TO US THROUGH CHRIST’S INTERCESSORY WORK AS OUR CONSTANTLY ADVOCATING HIGH PRIEST IN HEAVEN. IS THERE BIBLICAL SUPPORT FOR THIS CONCEPT?*
*ROMANS 3:23.I WOULD SUGGEST THAT THE BEST EVIDENCE IS IN ROMANS 3:23: “FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND COME SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD.” PLEASE RECALL THAT BEGINNING IN 3:19, PAUL HAS COMMENCED A SUSTAINED ARGUMENT IN SUPPORT OF SALVATION BY FAITH ALONE, NOT BY WORKS OF THE LAW. THE REASON FOR JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH AND NOT BY WORKS ARISES OUT OF THE GREAT NEED OF THE SINNER. ALL SINNERS ARE DEBASED NOT ONLY IN TERMS OF THE “GODLESSNESS” OF ACTIONS, BUT ALSO BY THE SINFULNESS OF THEIR CORRUPT NATURES.*
*THERE ARE NOT ONLY THE PAST SINS TO BE DEALT WITH, BUT ALSO THE PROBLEM OF A CONTINUOUS OOZING OF ALL SORTS OF DEPRAVITY OUT OF THE VERY PORES OF OUR SIN-RIDDEN NATURES. HE CLIMAXES THIS LINE OF ARGUMENT IN 3:23. LET’S EXPLORE THIS VERY CAREFULLY.*
*WHEN PAUL SAYS THAT “ALL HAVE SINNED,” HE IS OBVIOUSLY REFERRING TO THE SINS OF THE PAST. HE USES HERE THE GREEK PAST TENSE OF TOTALLY COMPLETED ACTION (CALLED AORIST TENSE). IN OTHER WORDS, THESE ARE THE ACTIONS THAT WERE DONE IN THE COMPLETED PAST OF THE SINNER’S LIFE.*
*NOW EVERY HONEST CHRISTIAN WILL CERTAINLY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT BEFORE THEY WERE CONVERTED AND SINCE THEY WERE CONVERTED THEY HAVE SINNED; THAT IS, THEY HAVE SINNED IN THE PAST. AND THESE SINS NEED TO BE COVERED BY THE JUSTIFYING MERITS OF CHRIST THROUGH FORGIVENESS. BUT THE REALLY STICKY QUESTION IS THIS: WHAT ABOUT THE SINFUL DEFECTS THAT WE ARE STILL DOGGED WITH IN THE PRESENT DISTRESS? IS THERE ANY PERSON WHO IS COMING CLOSE TO CHRIST WHO CAN REALLY CLAIM TO BE SINLESS IN BEHAVIOR AND ABSOLUTELY PURE IN THOUGHT AND MOTIVE?*
*PAUL SPEAKS TO THIS PREDICAMENT IN A VERY REALISTIC MANNER. NOT ONLY HAVE WE “ALL SINNED,” BUT WE ALSO “COME SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD.” WHAT IS THIS LATTER PHRASE REALLY SAYING? IN THE ORIGINAL GREEK, THIS PHRASE IS LITERALLY SAYING SOMETHING LIKE THIS: “WE ARE ALL CONTINUALLY, IN THE PRESENT MOMENT, ACTUALLY COMING SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD.”\* THE VERB TRANSLATED “COME SHORT” IS IN THE GREEK PRESENT ACTIVE INDICATIVE TENSE. THIS IS THE TENSE OF PRESENT, CONTINUOUS ACTIONS TAKING PLACE MOMENT BY MOMENT IN A PERSON’S LIFE.*

\* THIS IS WHIDDEN’S INTERPRETATIVE PARAPHRASE, BUT PLEASE DON’T WORRY, I HAVE NO INTENTION OF PRODUCING ANOTHER PARAPHRASED VERSION OF THE BIBLE. I AM ONLY TRYING TO MAKE THE MEANING CLEAR.

*NOW IN THE ROUGH AND TUMBLE OF EVERYDAY REALISTIC EXPERIENCE, WHAT IS THE ANSWER TO SUCH A CONDITION? IF THE SALVATION EXPERIENCE IS TO BE UNDERSTOOD IN PRIMARILY RELATIONAL NOT BEHAVIORAL TERMS, PAUL MUST BE COMMUNICATING SOMETHING LIKE THIS: JESUS, AS JUSTIFYING LORD, IS CONSTANTLY RECKONING OR ACCOUNTING THOSE WHO TRUST IN HIM AS PERFECT THROUGH THE MERITS OF HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS—MOMENT BY MOMENT.*
*GALATIANS 3:6-14.THESE VERSES SEEM TO PARALLEL ROMANS 3:23 AND LEAVE THE STRONG IMPLICATION THAT THE REASON WHY WE CANNOT BE JUSTIFIED BY WORKS OF THE LAW IS THAT SUCH WORKS WOULD NEVER BE PERFECT ENOUGH TO GET US OR KEEP US IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. THUS SAVING FAITH MUST HAVE AS ITS BASIS OR FOUNDATION THE ACCOUNTED MERITS OF CHRIST THAT ARE APPROPRIATED BY TRUST—FAITH ALONE.*
*ONCE AGAIN, LET’S BE REMINDED THAT THE BURDEN OF THIS PASSAGE IS THE “FAITH” METHOD OF SALVATION VERSUS THE “WORKS OF THE LAW” APPROACH. THE IMPLICATION OF THE CONSTANT “COMING SHORT” IN BEHAVIOR SEEMS TO BE INHERENT IN THE REASONING OF VS. 10: “FOR AS MANY AS ARE OF THE WORKS OF THE LAW ARE UNDER THE CURSE: FOR IT IS WRITTEN, CURSED IS EVERY ONE THAT CONTINUETH NOT IN ALL THINGS WHICH ARE WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW TO DO THEM.”*
*REFLECT FOR A MOMENT ON THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF PAUL’S CONTENTION IN THIS VERSE. CAN ANY ONE OF YOU, IN YOUR PRESENT CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE, TRULY SAY THAT YOU ARE CONTINUALLY DOING “ALL THINGS WHICH ARE WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW” (VS. 10)? I DO BELIEVE THAT THE ANSWER IS SELF-EVIDENT. THEN IT IS LITTLE WONDER THAT PAUL HASTENS TO SAY “THAT NO MAN IS JUSTIFIED BY THE LAW” SINCE “IT IS EVIDENT” THAT “THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH” (VS. 11).*
*I JOHN 1:6-2:1.THIS PASSAGE, ALONG WITH PAUL’S COMMENTS IN ROMANS 3 AND GALATIANS 3, SEEMS TO MOST OBVIOUSLY IMPLY THE SAME TRUTH. WHILE CHRISTIANS NEED TO BE WALKING IN THE “LIGHT” AND AVOIDING THE PATHS OF “DARKNESS,” THERE ARE TWO SOMEWHAT ANOMALOUS THINGS TO REMEMBER. FIRST OF ALL, WHEN BELIEVERS WALK IN THE “LIGHT,” THEY HAVE THE BLESSED PRIVILEGES OF “FELLOWSHIP ONE WITH ANOTHER” AND THEY MAY KNOW THAT THE “BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST . . . CLEANSETH US FROM ALL SIN” (VS. 7). THEY, HOWEVER, ARE CAUTIONED NEVER TO SAY “WE HAVE NO SIN” LEST THEY BE FOUND IN A STATE OF PROFOUND SELF-DECEPTION (VSS. 8, 10).*
*IN THE MIDDLE OF THESE TWO ANOMALOUS, ALMOST SEEMINGLY CONTRADICTORY STATES, BELIEVERS ARE REMINDED THAT THEY NEED TO BE IN A STATE OF CONSTANT PENITENCE. SUCH A FRAME OF MIND WILL BE EVIDENCED BY CONFESSION OF SIN AND THE CONSTANT ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS AND CLEANSING FROM ALL “UNRIGHTEOUSNESS” (VS. 9). DOES THIS CLEANSING REFER ONLY TO THE STATE OF BEING FORGIVEN, OR DOES IT ALSO REFER TO ACTUAL CLEANSING AWAY OF SINFUL HABIT PATTERNS? IN OTHER WORDS, IS IT ONE OR THE OTHER, OR IS IT BOTH? I WOULD SUGGEST THAT THE CONTEXT OF VS. 9 SUGGESTS THAT IT REFERS TO BOTH, BUT WITH THE STRONG IMPLICATION THAT THE CLEANSING OF “HABIT PATTERNS” AND OUR SINFUL NATURES IS NEVER ABSOLUTE THIS SIDE OF GLORIFICATION. IF VICTORY OVER SINFUL NATURE AND HABIT PATTERNS IS ABSOLUTE, WHY THEN DOES JOHN WARN SUCH BELIEVERS TO AVOID CLAIMS THAT THEY “HAVE NO SIN” (VS. 8) OR THAT THEY “HAVE NOT SINNED” (VS. 10)?*
*BELIEVERS CAN CERTAINLY STAND COMPLETELY CLEANSED OF PAST SINS THROUGH FORGIVENESS, BUT THEY DO NOT SEEM TO BE ABLE TO STAND SINLESS IN CHARACTER OR NATURE. JOHN SEEMS TO SUGGEST THAT IN SOME SENSE OUR DAILY MEAT AND DRINK WILL BE PENITENCE. IN THE FIRST VERSE OF CHAPTER 2, JOHN GIVES FURTHER SUPPORT FOR THIS CONCLUSION: “THESE THINGS WRITE I UNTO YOU, THAT YE SIN NOT.” JOHN IS ABSOLUTELY CLEAR THAT THERE IS NO ROOM FOR SIN IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER. BUT THEN HE STRONGLY IMPLIES THAT THERE WILL BE SOME TYPE OF DEFICIENCIES AS CHRISTIANS GROW IN GRACE: “AND IF ANY MAN SIN, WE HAVE AN ADVOCATE WITH THE FATHER, JESUS CHRIST THE RIGHTEOUS.” HERE JOHN IS REMINDING THE BELIEVERS THAT THERE WILL BE INEVITABLE MESS-UPS, BUT THEY NEED NOT DESPAIR SINCE THERE IS ONE WHO ADVOCATES WITH THE FATHER FOR THEM.*
*WHAT ARE WE TO MAKE OF JOHN’S SOMEWHAT ANOMALOUS COUNSEL TO THE BELIEVERS? I WOULD SUGGEST THAT WHAT JOHN IS HERE REFERRING TO IS A SET OF BASIC ATTITUDES THAT SHOULD TYPIFY BELIEVERS; BUT HE IS ALSO BEING VERY REALISTIC THAT EVEN WITH THE BEST ATTITUDE OF FAITH, THERE WILL BE WHAT ELLEN WHITE CALLS “UNAVOIDABLE DEFICIENCIES” IN THE GROWTH EXPERIENCE OF THE BELIEVERS.*
*WHAT JOHN SEEMS TO BE SUGGESTING IN THESE VERSES IS A DISTINCTION BETWEEN WILLFUL, PREMEDITATED, HIGH-HANDED SINS AND THOSE OF A MORE ACCIDENTAL NATURE. BOTH TYPES OF SIN ARE CLEARLY SIN, BUT THE LATTER ARE NOT NEARLY AS DEADLY AS THE FORMER. AND FOR THE LATTER TYPE OF SINS (WHAT I CALL THE “BLIND-SIDE” HITS), JESUS IS CONSTANTLY RECKONING THE BELIEVERS AS ACCOUNTED PERFECT AND CLEANSED. THIS CONCEPT OF CHRIST AS OUR CONSTANTLY INTERCEDING ADVOCATE, MINISTERING THE MERITS OF HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR BELIEVERS, IS THE CORE FOUNDATION OF NOT ONLY JOHN’S UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE, BUT ALSO ELLEN WHITE’S.*
*IT IS TO ELLEN WHITE’S*