

Lesson Two

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Many of the features of the message brought by Paul are in contrast to previous revelations. One of the most striking of these, which clearly marks a new departure in God's ways, which had never been proclaimed before (even though it had been dimly pictured in a brief episode in Abraham's life), is justification by faith. This is a foundational revelation in the evangel of God which concerns God's Son and is to be heralded among all the nations for faith-obedience (Rom. 1:1-5). It is based on the revelation of the righteousness of God (Rom. 1:17; 3:21). Those who receive and accept its message are accounted just, "becoming God's righteousness" in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:21).

The apostle and exponent of this message is Paul after his severance from the other prophets and teachers in Antioch (Acts 13:1-3). In fact it was immediately after this that he first announced justification (Acts 13:38,39).

The basis for both the revelation of the righteousness of God and for justification is the blood of Christ (Rom. 5:9). This is the means by which justification is *gained*. The basis or means by which it is *received* today is faith apart from works of law (Rom. 3:21,22,28; 4:5). We are justified by faith alone. Let us examine each of these three points: *justification; faith; faith alone.*

JUSTIFICATION

The law could not vivify (give life) and therefore could not bring in righteousness. Only a limited justification in reference to particular acts and not involving a person's entire life could be given in the past. But justification *now* is through faith in the blood of Christ and gives us salvation and righteousness. In Paul's evangel the flesh recedes into the background; its true place is crucifixion; it meets its inglorious end on the cross.

Justification is the verdict: not guilty. It is not pardon or forgiveness though these terms are used figuratively in order to bring out the attitude of God's heart (Eph.1:7; Col.1:14). It is an acquittal which involves the additional blessing of fellowship and comfort. In Romans 4 we are taken back to Abraham as the example for the significance of justification. Here was the simplicity of a happy and free converse between God and His friend (*cf* Rom.4:17-21; James 2:23), which is a good picture of the standing of those justified.

BY FAITH

The faith through which we receive justification today is believing what God says to us. It parallels Abraham's example in Genesis 15 where God spoke, Abraham believed, "and it was reckoned to him for righteousness." God gives us His evangel to believe, which is that Christ died for our sins, was entombed, and has been roused the third day (1 Cor.15:3,4). In other words we put our faith in the blood of Christ (Rom.3:25), and so we receive the justification which His blood has purchased. This justification is reckoned to our account (*cf* Rom. 4:5).

BY FAITH ALONE

This justification by faith is entirely gratuitous (Rom.3:24). Faith itself is a gift (Phil.1:29), and there is no room for boasting in ourselves. It is not a faith which insists on visual evidence, such as Thomas demanded in John 20. It is that "happy" faith where we believe what God says to us, and where we are "not perceiving" (John 20:24-29). Also it is not a faith which requires works of us in order to bring it to perfection such as we read about in James 2:20-26. Paul brings the unique message in Romans 3 and 4 in which righteousness is given "apart from law" and "apart from acts" (Rom.3:21; 4:6).

There is no probation connected with this evangel. Our Lord's prayer on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they are not aware what they are doing" (Luke 23:34), led to the forty years of testing for the nation of Israel from the cross to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. But this is a settled justification based on the righteousness of God through the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing can separate us from this position in Christ.

CLASS PROJECTS

1. List some major contrasts between the revelations to Paul and previous revelations. What do these mean to us today in terms of: a) our assurance, b) our attitude toward other people, c) our view of God?
2. Consider the differences between the *forgiving* in Matthew 6:14, 15 and the *justifying* in Romans 5:6-9.
3. Discuss the meaning of *justify* with reference to its usage in Luke 7:29; 18:14; James 2:24; and Romans 3:4. What distinct connotations are implied by this word in each of these passages? What root meaning can be carried over in all these passages?

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