

Justification By Faith

Galatians chapter 2 demonstrates a fundamental principle that lies behind the system of salvation established by the great Deity:

“... a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not of the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal. 2:16).

The word “justified” signifies, being made righteous, and in these words we have the principle being established that a man cannot be made righteous in the sight of Yahweh by obedience to Law. Rather, it is through faith, or belief in Jesus Christ, that righteousness is imputed. For our exhortation today, we shall consider this vital aspect of our salvation, and follow the theme through both Old and New Testaments.

Romans and chapters 3 & 4, demonstrates the principle of Justification by Faith in considerable detail – particularly chapter 4. Here the examples of Abraham and David are considered as examples of men who were considered righteous (i.e. justified) through faith, despite being sinners and not being righteous by works:

“If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Rom. 4:2-3).

The Scripture saying being cited here, comes from Genesis chapter 15:

“He [i.e. Yahweh] brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy Seed be. And he believed in Yahweh; and he counted it to him for righteousness ...” (Gen. 15:5-6).

Abraham’s faith then, was not a nebulous feeling that exists in some today, it was a firm conviction regarding a specific promise. The Apostle comments concerning Abraham thus:

“Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform” (Rom. 4:18-20).

Notice the terms employed here: “being not weak in faith”, “He staggered not”, “being fully persuaded”. There was no shadow of doubt in Abraham’s mind: that the promises that God had made would indeed come to pass exactly as described. He trusted in the principle of life out of the dead: both the natural impotence of his own body, and that of his elderly wife – and these things were “not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead ...” (Rom. 4:23-24 see also Jas 2:23). We therefore, must share Abraham’s faith if we are to be blessed in the same way as he – being counted as righteous.

WHAT IS RIGHTEOUSNESS?

We need to go right back to elementary terms if we are to understand how we can be counted as righteous before the Almighty Creator. What is righteousness? There is an interesting use of the Hebrew term in Leviticus chapter 19:

“Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am Yahweh your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt” (Lev. 19:35-36).

In this citation, the word “just” is the word for “righteous”. There was to be “no unrighteousness ... in weight or in measure”, but the weights and measures were to be “just”, or “righteous”. This passage is interesting, in that it attributes inanimate objects as being “righteous” or otherwise – objects that in themselves can have no moral qualities. The sense here is that the weights and measures so described, were to be “right” for the job in hand. They were truthful and accurate in their use, as distinct from unrighteous weights and measures which could not be so used. There is a comparison made with this principle regarding men: particularly a Gentile King, Belshazzar:

“TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting” (Dan. 5:27).

Belshazzar was not a “just” weight: when tested he was “found wanting”, and so his kingdom was to be taken away from him and given to the Medes and Persians. Again, we read of the ungodly:

“Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity” (Psa. 62:9).

When laid in the balance of Divine Justice, men at both end of the social spectrum are found “lighter than Vanity” – wanting in the things of the Spirit. But by contrast to the state of the natural man, believers in the resurrection of Christ look towards the “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” to be given to the faithful at his appearing (see 2 Cor. 4:17-18).

LAW AND FAITH

Sometimes Law and Faith are seen as being mutually exclusive principles. Hence the term “legalism versus faith” is used to describe the apparent paradox. But in Scripture, this is not so: the Law testified concerning faith. So Messiah taught the scribes and Pharisees:

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, ***judgment, mercy, and faith***: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone” (Mat. 23:23).

Far from being the opposite to Law, faith was actually part of the Law! We are familiar with the principle of Judgment being part of the Mosaic code, but what about “mercy” and “faith” – according to Messiah, these were the “weightier matters” contained in the Law. Again, Moses himself, as being the great Lawgiver, was a man of immense faith, to such an extent that even the faith of Messiah is compared with it:

“Wherefore holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; who was faithful to him that appointed him, ***as also Moses was faithful*** in all his house” (Heb. 3:2, see also vs 3-6).

The truth of the matter is that “the law made nothing perfect, but it was the bringing in of a better hope; by the which we draw nigh to God” (Heb. 7:19). And again, “therefore by the deeds of the law there shall be no flesh justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe ...” (Rom. 3:20-22).

Law and Faith then, are not mutually exclusive principles: rather the Law testified of the righteousness that would be established outside of its scope. In this regard, the Law was a divinely appointed schoolmaster, designed to teach certain principles in relation to Messiah, the Great High Priest. So we read thus:

“the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, **that** we might be justified by faith”
(Gal. 3:24 see also vs 11).

Notice here, the function of the law was to bring men and women to the position whereby they could become justified by faith. Through it’s shadowy ordinances, it brought Israel to Christ, and fulfilled the purpose it was designed to have.

ABRAHAM AND DAVID

Romans chapter 4 brings us to consider two examples of how men are justified by faith: Abraham and David. They are both presented as instances where men “believed on him that justifieth the ungodly” unto whom God imputed righteousness without works. Joshua 24 describes the condition of Abraham and his family before receiving the Divine calling. It records Joshua’s words to the people: “Now therefore fear Yahweh, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: **and put away the gods which your fathers served** on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye Yahweh.” (Josh. 24:14). From these words, we find that the “fathers” served idols the other side of the Euphrates (the flood), which includes Abraham, the father of the faithful. Abraham was not justified by works, but by grace through the faith that he had when he was called and received the promises.

Again, David the greatest king over the house of Israel, famously sinned and trespassed against the Almighty. Committing both adultery and murder, he would have been condemned to death by the Mosaic Law. But he threw himself upon the mercy of Yahweh, and pleaded for forgiveness – thus providing an example of justification by faith, not works. Hence in his Psalm of repentance, he was inspired to write:

“Have mercy upon me, O Elohim, according to thy loving kindness: according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me ...” (Psa. 51:1-3).

David’s sin began when he beheld the beautiful Bath-Sheba washing herself. Making provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof, he took her and lay with her in an adulterous union. But he repented for his sin, and prayed that he might undergo an inward washing, that his sin might be cleansed and washed away altogether. Truly his example fits the words of the Apostle that “blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” (Rom. 4:7-8).

THE OFFERING UP OF MESSIAH

Hebrews chapter 10 emphasises the limitations of the Law: “For it is **not possible** that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Heb. 10:4). But to take away sins was not the purpose of the Law: as we saw earlier, it testified of how men might be justified through faith in what it represented concerning Messiah, the Anointed One of Yahweh. The Lord Jesus Christ himself was the means whereby those who lived under the Mosaic system could receive forgiveness – and justification by faith. So we read that “for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, **for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament**, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:13).

So then, we find that faith in Messiah forms the basis of our imputed righteousness in the sight of our Heavenly Father. Scripture describes this feature in different ways: symbolically, as having our garments washed in the blood of the lamb (Rev. 7:14), and literally, as being forgiven for his name’s sake (1 Jno. 2:12). Indeed, this feature is found in the Old Testament prophets: “he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant **justify many**; for he shall bear their iniquities” (Isa. 53:11).

In the offering up of Messiah, we behold a great declaration of the Righteousness of God. He is:

“set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” (Rom. 3:25-26).

This declaration of our Father’s Righteousness is the very basis upon which men and women can be saved. The Name of Jesus Christ is a saving Name, for he declared his Father’s righteousness where we cannot. Being wholly obedient to the Will of Yahweh, he forms the basis upon which men can be reconciled to God, and be partakers of his righteousness.

As we consider the work of our Redeemer, we look forward to life in the coming kingdom over which Messiah shall reign. Whereas in the current dispensation, through the weakness of the flesh, we continue to sin, in the future our natures shall be changed. Whereas now we have righteousness imputed through faith, in the future we shall be inherently righteous. Righteousness shall be given to us in the transformation of our nature:

“Who shall ascend into the hill of Yahweh? Or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from Yahweh, **and righteousness** from the Elohim of his salvation” (Psa. 24:3-5).

As we come therefore, to memorialise the sacrifice of Messiah, we behold one who was holy, true and just in all his ways. We come as the spiritual seed of Abraham, and heirs according to the promise, seeking the grace of Yahweh. We come as those who trust in Yahweh’s’ power to save, in faith in the work of Messiah. And we come to glorify our Heavenly Father, that upon the basis of the Righteousness of His Son, we might be transformed in due time, to become like him, when he shall look upon us, and the travail of his soul, and indeed be satisfied.

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