

4. Justified by Faith (3Q 2010—Redemption in Romans)

Biblical material: *Romans 3:19–31.*

Quotes

- God can save all who trust Him. That’s the message of Romans. *A. Graham Maxwell*
- Justification takes place in the mind of God and not in the nervous system of the believer. *C.I. Schofield*
- Justification is the very hinge and pillar of Christianity. *Thomas Watson*
- Nobody has understood Christianity who does not understand... the word ‘justified.’ *John R.W. Scott*
- If Christ justifies you he will sanctify you! He will not save you and leave you in your sins. *Robert Murray M’Cheyne*

Questions

Why is this chapter *so* important? How do we understand the true meaning of justification? What is the role of the law? What is God offering? How does what we do fit into the plan of salvation? Why are these ideas often seen as complicated? In what way does this answer the issues in the great controversy? How do we respond personally?

Bible discussion

The law only points out the problem. Not that this is bad thing, but it only confirms what we already know! Before God none of us has anything to boast about. The law only helps us understand what sin really is (3:19-20). But then comes some of the most encouraging words in the Bible:

“But now God’s true character of right has been demonstrated—in a way that isn’t to do with the law, even though it was spoken of by the law and the prophets—God’s character of right has been demonstrated to everyone who believes and trusts in Jesus Christ. It doesn’t matter who we are: everyone has sinned and we miss out on God’s glorious presence. God’s free and gracious gift is to make us right through the salvation of Christ Jesus, whom God presented to bring about reconciliation as we trust in him. He shed his blood to prove he is truly right, for previously he would hold back and pass over sins, but now at this time God proves he does what’s right, and that he makes right those who trust in Jesus.” Romans 3:21-26 FBV.

That’s the gospel in a nutshell—and this is truly good news. God himself takes the initiative and makes us right. Not in an artificial way that ignores the truth of what we are, but with our acceptance, begins his work of transformation, making us right. He sets right the wrong, heals the sin, and remakes us in his wonderful image. In this way he *sets right everyone who believes and trusts in Jesus Christ*. For many this seems too “easy,” and we want to add in our own contributions! We also want to make it sound complicated and so call it “justification.” But this is only the Latin way of saying “set right” or “make right” in English. The truth is that *God saves everyone who trusts him!* That trust is not from any good that we have—in fact it is a recognition of our “wrongness” to the extent we put ourselves completely in his trustworthy hands.

Otherwise we miss out on God's glorious presence eternally if we do not respond. (Note that "falling short of the glory of God" as these words are often translated only gives the sense of incompleteness, not reaching God's glory—as if we could! The better idea is that we truly miss being with God in all his glory—we will not be there...)

The chapter ends with the emphasis that as a result we don't have anything to boast about. It's not our own efforts that save us, or any legal observance, but total committed trust in our loving, saving Lord (3:27, 28). God is the God of everyone. Finally we do not get rid of the law, in fact we confirm its importance as we trust in the God who makes us right (3:31).

Comment

Too often we talk in riddles here. We use words like sanctification and justification, imputed and imparted, propitiation and expiation... But the simple truth is that by trusting God, and all that such trust means, then God can and will make us right. Simple words that describe God's saving, healing actions in and for us. This is his "free and gracious gift," one that we can't claim to deserve, but which is centered in the love of God for his lost, dying children. Why can't we take him at his word, and simply believe it? We are so conditioned to want to work to achieve what we want, so reluctant to accept free gifts that we tell God we'd rather pay!

What must that feel like for God? He knows that without his help, his healing intervention, we will all die, and die eternally. Yet we so often turn away, believing in a "do-it-yourself" religion. We talk about "cheap grace," suggesting that to simply trust in God is insufficient. That we have to be doing right. That we have to already be acceptable to God. That we can't be saved unless we deserve it.

God in this wonderful presentation of his good news says no to all of that. Trust me, he says, and you will be made right. You will see the results in your life. Not because of your own rightness, but because I am making you right. There will be results to be sure, but they are results, not causes of being right. May God always "right" us!

Ellen White Comments

Christ has all power in heaven and in earth, and He can strengthen the wavering, and set right the erring. He can inspire with confidence, with hope in God; and confidence in God always results in creating confidence in one another. {RC 21}

Angels could not fully portray the character of God, but Christ, who was a living impersonation of God, could not fail to accomplish the work. The only way in which he could set and keep men right was to make himself visible and familiar to their eyes. That men might have salvation he came directly to man, and became a partaker of his nature...

Christ exalted the character of God, attributing to him the praise, and giving to him the credit, of the whole purpose of his own mission on earth,—to set men right through the revelation of God. In Christ was arrayed before men the paternal grace and the matchless perfections of the Father. In his prayer just before his crucifixion, he declared, "I have manifested thy name." "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." When the object of his mission was attained,—the revelation of God to the world,—the Son of God announced that his work was accomplished, and that the character of the Father was made manifest to men. {ST, January 20, 1890}

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