

Justification by Faith

by Danny Brown

The Bible is God's book of truth designed to teach men how to be saved. It reveals that men are *justified by faith*; saved by faith. ***"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*** (Romans 5:1-2) No doctrine is more plainly taught in the New Testament. We believe that men are saved or justified by faith. However, there are some weighty questions that need Bible answers. WHEN does faith save? HOW does faith save? Are men saved at the point of faith without any further acts of obedience? Are men saved by faith ONLY or are men saved when faith works (obeys) through love?

Defining Terms

Justification: Justification is from the Greek word *dikaiosis* which is defined by Arndt and Gingrich in these terms: "*Justification, vindication, acquittal*" Thayer, in his Greek lexicon on pg 151, defines the word as "*the act of God's declaring men free from guilt and acceptable to him; adjudging to be righteous.*" Paul, in speaking of Christ, says, "*Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. (Romans 4:25)* Paul also says, "*Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation: even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.*" (Romans 5:18) Thus *freedom from guilt, vindication, acquittal from sins* comes through the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ.

Faith: Three characteristics of Faith: First, Faith is conviction that is grounded in evidence. (John 20:30-31; Rom 10:17) Faith in God and Jesus Christ as His Son is anchored in the credibility of the Biblical record that is substantiated by ample evidence. Second, Faith involves trust. Once one arrives at conviction that God is and that Jesus Christ is His son (with the various truths that are attendant to that) he is genuinely disposed to trust the Savior for the salvation that only he can effect. (John 2:24; 14:6) Thirdly, Faith is involved in submitting to the divine will in obedience to Heaven's requirements. (James 2:19; John 3:36)

Grace: W. E. Vine defines grace on the part of the bestower as "*the friendly disposition from which the kindly act proceeds, graciousness, loving kindness, goodwill generally.*" Notice three characteristics of Grace: First, Grace bears the characteristic of favor bestowed. (Eph 2:7) Secondly, for the most part it has the meaning of favor that is undeserved, thus unmerited favor. (Romans 11:6) Thirdly, It is the essence of grace that it is free. If grace were an obligation on God or Christ's part, it would no longer be grace. The grace that is under consideration in this article is that which comes by Jesus Christ. (John 1:17)

Salvation: Basically the word means *deliverance, preservation*. The sense in which it is used in this article is the deliverance that Jesus Christ gives to men in relation to their sins. He delivers them from their sins. Jesus said, *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”* (Mark 16:16) That is, he will be delivered from the guilt and consequence of sin. As a result of being saved, he will have a right relationship with God and enjoy the hope of heaven.

Justification Does Not Come By Law

Justification by law is entirely out of the question. No sinner can ever be justified by law. It is not the nature of law to justify. It is the nature of law to approve the obedient and condemn the disobedient. Should anyone render perfect obedience to law, he would be just. He would be just before the law, but not a justified sinner. He would be approved before the law because he had not violated it. Once the law is violated he stands condemned for there is no provisions by law for justification. So justification by law is not conceivable.

In the book of Romans, Paul deals with this question. In Chapter one He shows that the Gentiles are guilty of sin and are worthy of death. (Rom 1:18-32) In Chapter two he reveals that the Jews are doing the same things. (Rom 2:1) In Chapter three he makes the sweeping statement, *“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and **all the world may become guilty before God.** 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.**”* (Rom 3:19-20)

Not Justified by Works

Now, there are two conceivable methods of justifying a sinner. Justification by works is one method. The Jews supposed that in the ceremonial works of their law there was something really meritorious or compensative in its nature, affording the worker somewhat of merit or compensation to set over against his sins, to go to his credit against past delinquencies. Such works were called, “works of righteousness.” It seems that many today have the same idea. They view life as sort of a balance scale. When they do evil or sin, the balance tips against them. Then they must do “works of righteousness” which merit tipping the scale back to balance or over on the side of righteousness. Thus, it is believed, that it will be better at the judgment if the scale is tipped farther to the righteous side than to the wicked. This has led to the false doctrine of auricular confession and doing penance to balance the scale. However, justification by this method is justification without Christ. Paul spoke very plainly in opposition to such a doctrine and practice when he said, *“**Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.**”* (Titus 3:5) Works of righteousness or meritorious works have nothing to do with our being saved because salvation is by Grace. (Eph 2:8)

Paul uses Abraham as an example to show that works of the law, works of righteousness or meritorious works do not save us. *“Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. . . . What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For 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. Now to him that worketh is there reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”* (Romans 3:27 – 4:5)

Paul makes a contrast between works and faith. He puts works on one side and faith on the other. On the side of works one can boast of the reward, He hath whereof to glory. His reward is due him as a debt. It should be obvious that the works under consideration are meritorious works. On the other hand, on the side of faith, there is no boasting, no glorying; the reward is not of debt, but of grace and righteousness. I have a question. Most religious bodies believe in and practice some sort of baptism. Now, on which side of this contrast is baptism to be placed: On the side of meritorious works or on the side of faith? If it is placed on the side of works, then whatever blessing is received by being baptized, one can boast of and glory in. The blessing is not of grace or faith but God owes the blessing as a debt. I place baptism for remission of sins that Peter commanded (Acts 2:38) on the side of faith. There is no boasting or glorying. The blessing, having sins forgiven, is of grace, not debt. Baptism, like repentance and confession of faith, is an act of faith and not a work of merit.

Justified by Faith, Not Faith Only

Paul said, *“Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (Rom 5:1) Read it again carefully, you will see that the little particle *only* is not in the text. Paul did not say we are *“justified by faith only.”* He said we are *“Justified by faith.”* If he had said we were *“justified by faith only”* he would have contradicted James, who said, *“Ye see how that by works (obedience DB) a man is justified, and **not by faith only,**”* (James 2:24) This is the only time *“faith only”* is mentioned in the New Testament, but instead of teaching justification by it, it teaches the very opposite – *“Not by Faith Only.”* James further illustrates by saying, *“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also”* (James 2:26) To have *“faith only”* is to have a dead faith, and a dead faith will not justify or save. Some have affirmed a similar thing in different words. Such as: *“That man is saved at the point of faith before and without any further acts of obedience.”* If so, one is saved without confessing Christ, which the Scriptures say is unto salvation. (Rom 10:9,10)

Justified by Faith

Protestants have generally taught the doctrine of *“justification by faith”* since

the reformation movement of the 1500's. In fact it has been styled the "great doctrine of the reformation" and for a long time was made sort of a test of Protestant orthodoxy. Then when the restoration movement of the 1800 and 1900's began teaching that baptism for remission of sins was necessary to salvation a conflict arose. The argument is substantially this: Whatever teaching conflicts with the doctrine of justification by faith is unscriptural. In the eyes of many, the doctrine of baptism for the remission of sins does so conflict, therefore the doctrine of baptism for the remission of sins is unscriptural. However, such is not the case. There is no conflict. The doctrine of justification by faith is a Bible doctrine. (Romans 5:1). The doctrine of baptism for remission of sins is a Bible doctrine. (Acts 2:38) Since the Bible is true and truth does not conflict and both doctrines are Bible doctrines they do not conflict. In truth baptism for remission of sins is a manifestation or act of faith. Thus being baptized for remission of sins is justification by faith.

Perhaps we can illustrate this with Abraham:

1. *"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed: and he went out, not knowing whither he went."* (Heb 11:8)
2. *"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac:"* (Heb 11:17)
3. *"Was not Abraham our father justified by works (obedience DB), when he offered Isaac his son upon the altar."* (James 2:21)
4. *"Ye see then how that by works (obedience DB) a man is justified, and not by faith only."* (James 2:24)
5. *"The scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God."* (James 2:23)

Abraham was justified by faith when that faith obeyed for *"faith without works is dead."* (James 2:20) He was not justified by faith only, but by a working or obedient faith.

Likewise, the man today seeking to be saved reads the testimony of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and believes that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God for *"faith cometh of hearing and hearing by the word of God."* (Rom 10:17) He learns from Peter that he is to *"repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* (Acts 2:38) Like Abraham he believes in God and also believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and obeys the divine commands given him. Thus, he is justified by faith, not by faith only, but by an obedient faith. *"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love."* (Gal 5:6)

“Justification by faith. Romans 5:1, *“Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Does “justified by faith,” mean “justified” without baptism because it is not mentioned? Well, just apply the same reasoning to repentance, confession and love for God. They are not mentioned. The reasoning used by some to exclude baptism from God’s plan of justification will also exclude repentance and love for God. The unholy consequences of this is that one can be justified by faith while at the same time he is hating God and is impenitent regarding his sins. So the process of reasoning used attempting to show that baptism is not a condition of justification or salvation is invalid.” – Charles Boshart, Tract, “Faith, A Condition of Salvation.”

Justified “BY FAITH”

“In every case (in Heb 11 DB) the phrase “by faith” includes obedience to all the things commanded. ‘Perfect faith is taking God at his word, and doing what he says.’ Is not that a good definition? Is it not true? Try substituting this definition in a few of the examples found in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. By taking God at his word and doing what he said, Noah built the ark. By taking God at his word and doing what he said, Abraham offered up Isaac. By taking God at his word and doing what he said, they kept the Passover. And by taking God at his word and doing what he says, we are justified. Certainly, if we did not take God at his word and do what he says. we would not be justified.

“By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were swallowed up’ (Heb 11:29). They crossed the Red Sea ‘by faith,’ but they were not on the other side the moment they believed. They spent a night of anxious toil and great fear before they could sing the song of deliverance on the other side. Here the phrase ‘by faith’ spans the Red Sea, and includes every step they took in crossing.

“By some it is thought that because Paul says we are justified by faith, baptism is excluded. But in the examples so far considered the phrase ‘by faith,’ instead of excluding the acts of faith, which, in reality make faith perfect, actually includes obedience. And it can be plainly shown that ‘by faith’ in this case includes baptism. Paul says: ‘For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea’ (1 Cor. 10:1-2). They crossed the Red Sea by faith, and in crossing they were baptized. ‘By faith’ includes what was done in crossing. But in crossing they were baptized. Therefore, ‘by faith,’ in this example, includes baptism. From this conclusion there is no escape.” – (C. R. Nichols, R. L. Whiteside, “Sound Doctrine” Vol II, pg 136-137)

The Believer Has The Power (Right) to Become . . .

“He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that

believe on his name.” (John 1:11-12) Man cannot become a child of God unless he receives Christ, but not everyone who receives Christ becomes a child of God. The believer is not that yet a child of God, but he does have the power or right to become a child of God. For example: A boy and girl plan to marry. They realize they cannot marry until they secure a marriage license. They secure the marriage license from the courthouse, yet they are not married, but they now have the power, the right, to get married. They are not husband and wife until the marriage ceremony is completed. So also, the one who receives Christ, believes on him, is not yet a child of God, but he has the right to become a child of God. If he is saved at the point of faith, at the time he receives Christ, he is saved before he becomes a child of God. The one who receives Christ, the believer on Christ, does have a right he did not have before belief. He now has the right to become a child of God by obedience to His will. (See Matt 7:21)

Some Believers Who Did Not Become God’s Children

In John 8:31-44 Jesus reveals to us a group of Jews who believed on Him (strongest words for belief), yet he declared that they were of the devil! Notice, *“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him. If ye continue in my word then are ye my disciples indeed.” (John 8:31)* Jesus declared that they were believers. If the theory that salvation by faith only is true, then this is a group of saved people, the children of God. But such is not the case. They were believers, but Jesus charged that they were the children of the devil. *“Ye are of your father the devil, and the lust of your father ye will do;” (John 8:44)* Believers – but too stubborn to obey the word of God. They had the right, as believers, to become children of God, but had not exercised that right.

Another group of believers, who were not saved, is revealed to us. *“Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” (John 12:42-43)* They “believed on him.” Jesus said they did. They loved popularity. They denied Christ. Their condition is certain: *“But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt 10:33)* They denied the Lord because there was something they loved more. Many today are in the same condition. They believe, but love the works of the flesh more than the Lord and His way.

King Agrippa is an example of a believer who was not saved. The Apostle Paul was privileged to preach to this king. He related the case of his own conversion, preached of the crucified and resurrected Christ and emphasized that Moses and the prophets had foretold these things. Then he declared, *“King Agrippa believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.” (Acts 24:27)* Yet, the king replied, *“Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.” (Acts 26:27)* Agrippa was a believer, but not a child of God. The king was a believer, yet as far as the Bible reveals, he went into eternity unprepared to meet God. As a

believer he had the right to become a Christian, a child of God, but he did not, although almost persuaded. Almost cannot avail. Almost is but to fail. Almost, but lost!

By Faith After

“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.” (Hebrews 11:30) The walls of Jericho fell by faith – but not the moment the people believed, but *after* they had complied with the divinely given conditions. Suppose some had said, “You don’t have to do anything, just believe.” Would the walls have fallen? NO. Acting by faith is believing God and doing what he says. To do other than what God commanded would have been proof of a lack of faith. This was a test of their faith. The walls fell by faith *after* they obeyed by marching around the walls for the seven days. Faith only? No. The walls fell by faith, after faith obeyed.

Justified By Faith – When?

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” (Hebrews 11:7) Not by faith only. Not at the moment Noah believed. God told Noah what to do to be saved, and by faith Noah did it – he prepared the ark to the saving of his house. He was saved by faith. But when? When faith obeyed.

“And the Lord said unto Moses. Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.” (Numbers 21:8) The people had sinned, and God sent fiery serpents among them. The Bible says, *“Much people of Israel died.”* Yet God spoke these words of salvation. Dying men could be saved. Not by faith only, but by complying with the conditions – to look upon the serpent of brass. Saved by faith. When? When faith obeyed. If some of today’s teachers had been there, they would have said, “Just believe and you will be healed.” However, God said, *“It shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.”* Looking at the brazen serpent was not serpent salvation, but was salvation by faith. By faith when? When faith obeyed!

“And such were some of you: but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the spirit of our God.” (1 Cor 6:11) These were said to have been (1) ‘washed,’ (2) ‘sanctified,’ (3) ‘justified.’ Hence, they were ‘justified by faith’ after they were ‘washed.’ Now, when is one ‘washed’? *“And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on his name.” (Acts 22:16)* Note the order of this verse: (1) ‘arise,’ (2) ‘be baptized,’ (3) ‘wash away thy sins.’ While this verse does not say what washes ‘away’ ‘sins’ it does tell when sins are washed ‘away,’ vis., after one is ‘baptized.’ So, (1) One is not ‘justified by faith’ until after he has been ‘washed,’ i.e., has his ‘sins’ washed ‘away,’ (2) But, one does not have his

'sins' washed 'away' until after he is 'baptized.' (3) Therefore, one is not 'justified by faith' until after he is 'baptized.' 'Being justified by faith' does not exclude baptism, it includes it." – Charles Boshart

Conclusion

The Scriptures teach that men are justified by faith. Justification is not by law. Neither is justification by works of righteousness or works of merit. Neither is it by faith only or at the point of faith, before and without any further acts of obedience. Each one is justified by faith when he takes God at His word and does what he says. By faith includes whatever acts of obedience God has commanded in that particular case.

The phrase "justified by faith" includes obedience in baptism. Paul said, "*For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.*" (Gal 3:26) What is the basis on which Paul affirms that they were the children of God by faith? He immediately offers the proof. "*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*" (Gal 3:27) The little word "for" in this passage is like a signpost that says, "Here is the reason why." Thus Paul affirmed that they were the children of God by faith because they had been baptized into Christ.

To all who have been justified by faith, be thou faithful unto death. May you diligently study the Scriptures that your faith may grow. May you pass every trial that your faith may be strong. May you be obedient to all the responsibilities and obligations of our Lord Jesus Christ that your faith may be perfect. May each one so conduct himself in this life that each one can look with hope to the life that is yet to come. May we so act that we may enjoy God's favor here, His grace and loving kindness in death and His holy presence in eternity.