



"Watchman, what of the night?"

The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come. Isaiah 21:11-12

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Today a controversy is raging within the Church - as desperate, as consequential as any battle ever fought in human history. Carchemish, Arbella, Pydna, Waterloo, the Marne, Dunkirk - even our own Lexington, Yorktown, and Gettysburg - all pale into insignificance. In the realm of the spiritual, only the battle fought in Gethsemane and continued through Calvary exceeds it. The controversy is concerning righteousness by faith, which in turn involves the doctrines of the incarnation, justification, sanctification, and the ultimate - the final atonement. In this thought paper, we shall be primarily concerned with the concept of justification, and what it means for the believer in Jesus Christ.

Before entering into the study proper, we need to note certain literature which is being published privately within the church which focuses the attention of the laity upon this important controversy. In Australia two publications have been released. One is by Mrs Gillian Ford, wife of the head of the theological department of Avondale College.¹ Three pages of parallel columns present what Mrs Ford considers "The True and False Gospels". Under the true she states that "Righteousness by Faith is justification alone;" and under what she considers to be false:- "Righteousness by faith is both justification and sanctification."² (That there be no confusion in the mind of the reader, the Adventist Laymen's Foundation considers the conclusions of Mrs Ford to be rank heresy.) Two doctors, also residing in Australia, have replied in a limited edition of an analysis of the conflicting concepts in the Seventh-day Adventist Church - Australian Division.³ Here in America, Dr Lloyd Rosenvold and his wife have prepared a brochure on the Gospel, and in the latest edition of this publication included a paper presented to the Biblical Research Committee of the Australian Division by an Elder F. A. Basham in which he challenged rightly the position of the theological department of Avondale College.⁴

Justification does involve an historical event in time. The Son of God died on the Cross of Calvary. That public sacrifice will never again be repeated in the manner or circumstances which surrounded that fateful Passion Week in the earthly life of our Lord. The words of faith which Abraham spoke to his son Isaac as they neared Moriah's height were fulfilled in the death of Jesus - God Himself did provide the sacrifice.⁵ As one meditates at the foot of the Cross, he is impressed with one stupendous fact - *Man cannot atone for himself*. This is humiliation most difficult for the mind and heart of man to grasp and accept.

Justification is general and provides for all men everywhere under all conditions regardless of individuality, circumstance, or disposition. This is true because all men have sinned, and sin is sin regardless of degree. Paul summarizes it this way:

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.⁶

The purpose of justification is also presented by Paul based in the fact that all have sinned. He wrote:

For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ: whom God hath 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, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.⁷

This is much more than a legal transaction based in a single historical event. Even as I can crucify the Son of God afresh,⁸ even so, the results and purposes of Calvary are ever in the present. Justification is to be a present daily experience to the one who is of the faith of Jesus. "I die daily" declared Paul.⁹ Every living child of God will experience "a conversion to God every day; and this conversion is not completed until he attains perfection of Christian character."¹⁰

It should be noted that the clause in verse 26 - "the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" - in the Greek text reads - "justifying the one who is of the faith of Jesus." The participle - justifying - is in the present tense signifying continuous action in what Paul calls the "now time". Now is the day of salvation, and it shall continue to be until the close of all human probation. The use of the noun to describe the believer, instead of the verb as translated in the KJV, is a significant parallel to the use made by John of the same in Revelation. Those who respond to the "everlasting gospel" and are finally declared to be steadfast are those saints who not only keep the commandments of God, but who also keep "the faith of Jesus."¹¹

The faith which is of and in Jesus justifies. And what was that faith? It was accepting what God said and did as is, regardless whether He could see it or not.¹² This is simply the same faith as defined by Paul of which Jesus is the author and finisher.¹³ Such a faith exercised by us gives us our title-deed.¹⁴

Since justification is the act of God which justifies us from sin, what has God said about this action on His part? "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."¹⁵ There is just one simple condition - confession, a recognition that we are sinners. The recognition of that forgiveness exceeds all human reasoning of justice - "through the righteousness of Christ we shall stand before God pardoned, as though we had never sinned."¹⁶ "It is our privilege to go to Jesus and be cleansed, and to stand before the law without shame or remorse."¹⁷ It is most difficult for the human mind to accept the results of justification, or the simple condition upon which it is based. But God so states; I accept by faith and act accordingly.

In the parable of the Prodigal Son we see justification from God's viewpoint, and how we in our human reasoning view it. The run-away son was sitting in the midst of swine when he finally came to himself and said that he would return to his father's house. He prepared his speech. He would say - "I have sinned; I am no more worthy to be called thy son, so make me a hired servant." So he leaves the hog pen and starts the homeward journey. The father sees him a great way off, and comes running to meet him. The prepared speech is given - *except* the father does not let the last part escape the son's lips. The request of the son to work his way back into the father's mercy is not recognized. All that the father asks is the confession as a sinner - the results follow - "Bring forth the best [Greek - first] robe and put it on him." The run-away boy is restored to his former position as if the days, and

months, and years that intervened since he left home had not been. He is pardoned; he is justified.¹⁸ He stands before the Father as if he had never sinned. O the height and depth of redeeming love!

There is still another parable which illustrates justification.¹⁹ "Two men went up into the temple to pray." Both were professed believers in the true God of Israel. They frequented the house of worship. Because of our present day concepts, we fail to catch the significance of this parable. A "Pharisee" and a "publican" in our mind today are different than they were viewed in the days of Christ. The Pharisee of Christ's day was the religionist, the one devoted to all the rules and regulations prescribed in the law of Moses plus some of his own applications of these rules. He gave alms; he prayed much. He was very pious, and was considered the really "spiritual" in Israel. The publican was a man employed in the government service of Rome. He didn't work for the church, nor was he connected to one of the religious groups of his day who had "separated" themselves from the world.

With this background, let us now translate this lesson to our own day. The Pharisee prayed - "I thank Thee that I am not as other men - I do not eat meat, nor eggs, nor drink milk. I fast; I tithe; I use herbs; and drink teas." [If there were women Pharisees, such might have added - "I wear my dresses just so many inches from the floor."] But the Publican - all he could say was - "God be merciful to me a sinner." AND what did Jesus say - "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other." Justification, and our standing before God is not based on how many reforms I practice, nor how much I do to show my piety and spiritual graces to reveal that I am not as other men. My acceptance with God is simply that I confess myself a sinner, which in reality is one of the hardest things for the proud heart of man to do.

Let us face up to the simple, plain teaching of Jesus. Even though I practice health reform - and I do - and any and all of the other reforms which we could mention, we are to admit - no matter how painful to our ego it is - "We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."²⁰ Doing what is our duty does not accrue merit, nor does it produce justification. We are justified solely by the mercy of our Heavenly Father, and the redemption that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. And this justification comes on only one condition - our confession as a sinner.

Why are we prone to be Pharisees? Because we want to atone for our sins. We want to be hired servants and work our way back into the mercy and favor of God. This cannot be! The very perversion of our human nature makes confession most difficult. I have a three-year old grandson. He was helping me mix mud for some rock laying here on the campus. He likes to pull the hoe back and forth through the mixture. I had it at just the right consistency, and went about my work. Jonathan also likes to play with water, and so proceeded to add some water when my back was turned. The first time he did not add enough to effect the mixture; but the second time was too much, so I reprimanded him. I told him that he could use the hoe no longer. He went off and crawled under the house for awhile. He did some thinking, and in a few minutes he came carrying some rocks really too large for him to carry. He was going to help, and knowing what I needed, he was going to win my approval so that he could use the hoe again. Now I dearly love him, and if he had only said - "Pa-pa [his name for me] I am sorry; I did wrong" - I would have let him continue to use the hoe. I would have made the adjustments to restore the consistency of the mixture, because he couldn't do it! There was nothing that he could do to atone for his overstepping.

Our Father loves us more than I can ever love my grandson. He has, and had to make

the restorations caused by sin - we cannot not - and so He says, "If you will confess, I will justify; I will forgive." And when we stand at last in the sight of an holy God without an intercessor, there will be no room to boast. Who covered my past sins so that I could stand on vantage ground? Did I atone because I practiced all the reforms? Who provided the power so that I could do that which was my duty to do? Was it my strength and spiritual vitality? No! - never can I boast, but only say:-

Just as I am without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

¹Gillian Ford, The Soteriological Implications of the Human Nature of Christ, Undated, 53 pages.

²Ibid., p. 9

³A. John Clifford, M. D. & Russell R. Standish, M. D., Conflicting Concepts of Righteousness by Faith in the Seventh-day Adventist Church - Australian Division, April, 1976, 161 pages

⁴Lloyd and Leola Rosenvold, The Gospel of the Kingdom, Undated, 35 pages.

⁵Genesis 22:7-8

⁶Romans 5:18

⁷Romans 3:23-26

⁸Hebrews 6:6

⁹I Corinthians 15:31

¹⁰Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 2, p. 505

¹¹Revelation 14:12

¹²Matthew 11:25-26

¹³Hebrews 12:2

¹⁴Ellen G. White, Messages to Young People, p. 35

¹⁵I John 1:9

¹⁶Ellen G. White, Ms. 1, 1892. See Review, June 17, 1976, p. 9

¹⁷Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, Chapt: "Faith and Acceptance", par. 7.

¹⁸Luke 15:17-24

¹⁹Luke 18:9-14

²⁰Luke 17:10

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IX-12 (Dec., 1976)

A QUESTION:- *Why is it essential that we know and experience what it means to be justified by faith?*

In Isaiah, Chapter 6, the prophet tells of his own experience and call to service.¹ He saw in vision the Lord sitting upon His throne, and the voices of the seraphims crying - "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." This vision of the holiness of the Lord unnerved Isaiah, and he recognized himself as a man of unclean lips dwelling in the midst of a people with unclean lips. Then a remarkable thing happened upon his recognition of his undone condition. One of the seraphims came with a live coal from off the altar, and touched his lips, declaring - "Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." The next thing he heard was the voice of the Lord calling for a volunteer to represent Him to the people. Now Isaiah could respond - "Here am I; send me."

We are told that this "vision given to Isaiah represents the condition of God's people in the last days. . . But if they, like Isaiah, will receive the impression

the Lord designs shall be made upon the heart, if they will humble their souls before God, there is hope for them. . . The work done for Isaiah will be performed in them. God will respond to the petitions coming from the contrite heart."² God's mouthpieces must be justified. They must know what justification by faith means to them. How can one go forth and proclaim the loud cry - pointing out sin with the consciousness of personal guilt and shame for his own sins? But one who is justified stands before the law "without shame or remorse."³ Because of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, he stands before God pardoned as though he had never sinned.⁴ Without fear he can respond to God's invitation - "Here am I; send me."

Consider briefly Peter's experience. On the day of Pentecost, he openly charged the House of Israel with the murder of the Son of God. He, who a few weeks before had declared - "I know not this man" - now declared Him to be both Lord and Christ.⁵ As I read the account in Acts 2, I do not find where anyone of the assembled group yelled back at Peter - "You cursed and swore and denied the Son of God yourself." There was only one response, being pricked in their hearts, they asked - "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"⁶ Why was it possible for Peter so to speak, and the reaction so to be? Because Peter after the denial had gone out and wept bitterly. He knew by experience what it meant to be justified.

Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.⁷

"The souls that turn to Him for refuge, Jesus lifts above the accusing and the strife of tongues. No man or evil angel can impeach these souls. Christ unites them to His own divine-human nature. They stand beside the great Sin-bearer, in the light proceeding from the throne of God."⁸

Let me tell you in all sincerity - the men and women who give the loud cry will be those who know by experience that they have been justified. They will have an experience with their great Sin-bearer which will set them above the strife of tongues - unimpeachable because the live coal from off the altar has touched their lips. Their iniquity is taken away, and their sin purged. In their mouths will be found no guile for they will be without fault before the throne of God.

¹Isaiah 6:1-8

²Ellen G. White, Review & Herald, December 22, 1896

³See Footnote #17, p. 4

⁴See Footnote #16, p. 4

⁵Acts 2:36

⁶Acts 2:27

⁷Romans 8:33-34

⁸Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 568

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NOTE: This thought paper is a condensation of a sermon which has been given in recent weeks in several places. The full message has been tape recorded. Ask for A-09 - Justification by Faith. Regular Price - \$2.00.

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