

Order of Salvation – All of Grace

Justification

The importance of justification

How can a sinner be right with God is the focus of the Scriptures. Throughout the Old and New Testament, this is the great theme. Luther called justification the mark of the standing or falling of the church.

The need for justification

After all, we have to meet God and appear before our Judge, and we are unrighteous. Our Creator is also our Law-giver, and He demands unbroken obedience in our whole life. If we keep the whole law, but fail in one point, we are guilty of having broken all His commands (Js. 2:10). And God the Judge is an infallible, impartial Judge and He will make no mistakes in His judgment (Heb. 4:13; Rom. 2:2; 12:14). Therefore our great concern should be: “How should man be just with God?” (Job 9:2).

The meaning of justification

Shorter Westminster Catechism: “Justification is an act of God’s free grace whereby He pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight only for the sake of Christ’s righteousness which is imputed to us and received by faith alone.”

The Author of justification

Who justifies? God does (Rom. 8:23). Sometimes people condemn some and justify others, but it is God who justifies. On the other hand there are some who try to justify themselves (Lk. 18:9). But we must receive our righteousness from God.

The source of justification

What moved God to justify sinners? His grace. “Being justified freely by his grace” (Rom. 3:24; cf. Tit. 3:7). There was nothing in the sinner that moved God to justify the sinner. No one forced Him to do this. Instead it is a gift of free grace.

The ground of justification

Divine grace does not overrule divine justice. Justice demands that the law be completely obeyed and the penalty for sin be completely paid. How then can God be just and the Justifier of the ungodly? (Rom. 3:26). The answer is in the Lord Jesus Christ alone (Rom. 8:3-4). He came to obey the law of God perfectly and pay the penalty for sin (Rom. 4:25; 5:8; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18).

The result of justification

- 1) My sins are forgiven (Ps. 32). My sins are gone... they're underneath the blood on the cross of Calvary, As far removed as darkness is from dawn; In the sea of God's forgetfulness.
- 2) I am counted righteous before God. "By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19). Jesus, thy blood and righteousness, My beauty are, my glorious dress (Zinzendorf). No condemnation now I dread; Jesus and all in Him is mine; alive in Him, my living head, and clothed in righteousness divine (Wesley). When I stand before the throne, dressed in beauty not my own, then Lord, shall I fully know, not till then, how much I owe" (M'Cheyne).

The instrument of justification

How do we receive this righteousness of Christ? By faith alone. "The vilest offender who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives" (F. Crosby). This is scriptural (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 3:22,26b,28; 5:1; Phil. 3:9; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9). The value of that faith lies in the object of faith, not in the strength of that faith.

Discussion Questions

- 1) What did Luther mean when he said: "a true believer is at the same time righteous and a sinner."
- 2) What does Habakkuk 2:4 (quoted in Rom. 1:17 mean): "The just shall live by faith."

Luther: "this doctrine can never be taught, urged and repeated enough. If this doctrine be lost, then is the doctrine of truth, life and salvation also lost and gone. If this doctrine flourish, then all good things flourish... (and) the true service of God and glory of God."

Kolhbrugge: "Rip off the rags wherewith you cover your wounds and show yourself as you really are to Him who is holy and just... Hear what Scripture says: God justifies not those who love the saints, not the just, the pious, no, no – the ungodly."