

## *Introduction*

Belying its smallness on such a big topic, this booklet has had a more-chequered period of gestation than most of my works. It started out as three chapters in my *Eternal Justification: Gospel Preaching to Sinners Marred by Hyper-Calvinism*. Then, having lightly edited these selected chapters to produce three articles, I saw that they could be turned into a handy booklet on the major doctrine of justification.

But why a booklet on justification by faith alone? Whether or not Martin Luther actually said, in precise terms, that ‘justification is the article by which the church stands and falls’,<sup>1</sup> the sentiment is right. And it is because I am convinced that it is right, that I go into print on it.

Moreover, the doctrine of justification by faith is under attack today, an attack which is both heavy and insidious. It always is under attack. It was under attack in the days of the apostles. It always will be under attack. And while there are many excellent books on the doctrine, and even though, in previous works, I myself have engaged with men like N.T.Wright on the matter,<sup>2</sup> it could just be that another little volume, because of its very smallness, might do some good. At least that is my hope and prayer in publishing this title.

Yes, justification by faith is the make-or-break doctrine. For most evangelicals and Reformed believers this is a truism. And herein lies the danger. Apparent familiarity

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<sup>1</sup> See Justin Taylor: ‘Luther’s Saying: “Justification Is the Article by Which the Church Stands and Falls”’. Taylor: ‘From what I’ve been able to find, the first use of this exact phrase was by Lutheran theologian Balthasar Meisner who said that it was a “proverb of Luther” (1615)... In 1618 Reformed theologian Johann Heinrich Alsted wrote: “The article of justification is said to be the article by which the church stands or falls”... Luther: “If this article [of justification] stands, the church stands; if this article collapses, the church collapses”’.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, my *Conversion, Hinge*.

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breeds, if not contempt, something akin to venerable neglect. As I see it, alas, many, locking this truth in a Confession, seem to treat it as little more than a prime exhibit, a treasured heirloom sitting quietly in a museum, something to be gawked at through a glass screen, or wheeled out on appropriate Reformed-anniversaries, but little more. In addition, many have too-desiccated a view of justification, but having already written at length about that, I will say no more about it here; see my *Four 'Antinomians' Tried and Vindicated: Tobias Crisp, William Dell, John Eaton and John Saltmarsh*.

This mistreatment of the doctrine of justification, with the corresponding undervaluation of what accrues to the believer in his justification, is worse than sad. I appeal to every believer: get a good grasp of the glorious doctrine of justification for yourself, and then set it to work! Justification by faith alone on the basis of God's grace should be preached far more than it is.

'But we do preach it!'

Let us hope so. But when I say that justification by faith alone has to be preached, I am saying that Scripture must be preached, Christ in Scripture must be preached, and sinners must be called to saving trust in him. I am not talking about a doctrine being lectured on. For when I say 'preached', I really do mean 'preached'. Too often, on those occasions when justification *is* wheeled out, it seems only to be lectured on. Preach it, I say again. I have been appalled, and still am, by the virtually-ubiquitous and boring lectures which are served up instead of preaching, preaching in general, not just on justification. So much so, I have gone into print on it; see my *Preaching Today: Food for Action as Well as Thought*. Specifically now, I want to stress that justification by faith must be preached, and preached with power and passion.

Then again, when I talk of 'preaching', although I am thinking of the stated ministry of the gospel in the usual import of the word, I also include the spread of the gospel in

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its widest possible new-covenant sense by every believer. I have in mind, of course, the priesthood of all believers.<sup>3</sup>

In preaching the gospel, the doctrine of justification by faith alone on the basis of God's grace must be preached to and for the saints. It is full of comfort for them; along with its Siamese twin, positional sanctification,<sup>4</sup> it lays the foundation for their assurance. And the doctrine is replete with motive for the saints' progressive sanctification. This is why justification by faith alone must be preached to and for the saints.

But justification by faith must also be preached (in the widest sense of the word) with power and passion to unconverted sinners. Unless sinners trust Christ they will perish. Sinners are under the wrath of God, and unless they repent and trust Christ, and are justified by faith through union with him, they will be damned for ever. It is only as they trust Christ that they are actually justified. Consequently, unless we are really preaching this make-or-break doctrine to unbelievers, we are hindering them hearing of the only way of salvation through the only Saviour for sinners. And we shall have to answer for it.

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<sup>3</sup> See my *The Priesthood*.

<sup>4</sup> See my *Fivefold; Positional*.