

NOT FAITH, BUT CHRIST

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OUR justification is the direct result of our believing the gospel; our knowledge of our own justification comes from believing God's promise of justification to every one who believes these glad tidings. For there is not only the divine testimony, but there is the promise annexed to it, assuring eternal life to everyone who receives that testimony. There is first, then, a believed gospel, and then there is a believed promise. The latter is the "appropriation," as it is called, which, after all, is nothing but the acceptance of the promise which is everywhere coupled with the gospel message. The believed gospel saves; but it is the believed promise that assures us of this salvation.

Yet, after all, faith is not our righteousness. It is accounted to us in order to righteousness (Rom 4:5, GREEK), but not as righteousness; for in that case it would be a work like any other doing of man, and as such would be incompatible with the righteousness of the Son of God; the "righteousness which is by faith." Faith connects us with the righteousness, and is therefore totally distinct from it. To confound the one with the other is to subvert the whole gospel of the grace of God. Our act of faith must ever be a separate thing from that which we believe.

God reckons the believing man as having done all righteousness, though he has not done any, and though his faith is not righteousness. In this sense it is that faith is counted to us for, or in order to, righteousness, — and that we are "justified by faith." Faith does not justify as a work, or as a moral act, or a piece of goodness, nor as a gift of the Spirit, but simply because it is the bond between us and the Substitute; a very slender bond in one sense, but strong as iron in another. The work of Christ for us is the object of faith; the Spirit's work in us is that which produces this faith: it is out of the former, not of the latter, that our peace and justification come. Without the touch of the rod the water would not have gushed forth; yet it was the rock and not the rod, that contained the water.

The bringer of the sacrifice into the tabernacle was to lay his hand upon the head of the sheep or the bullock, otherwise the offering would not have been accepted for him. But the laying on of his hand was not the same as the victim on which it was laid. The serpent-bitten Israelite was to look at the uplifted serpent of brass in order to be healed. But his looking was not the brazen serpent. We may say it was his looking that healed him, just as the Lord said, "lily faith hath saved thee"; but this is figurative language. It was not his act of looking that healed him, but the object to which he looked. So faith is not our righteousness: it merely knits us to the righteous One, and makes us partakers of His righteousness. By a natural figure of speech, faith is often magnified into something great; whereas it is really nothing but our consenting to be saved by another~ its supposed magnitude is derived from the greatness of the object which it grasps, the excellence of the righteousness which it accepts. Its preciousness is not its own, but the preciousness of Him to whom it links us.

Faith is not our physician; it only brings us to the Physician. It is not even our medicine;

it only administers the medicine, divinely prepared by Him who "healeth all our diseases." In all our believing, let us remember God's word to Israel: "I am Jehovah, that healeth thee" (Exod. 14:26). Our faith is but our touching Jesus; and what is even this, in reality, but His touching us?

Faith is not our saviour. It was not faith that was born at Bethlehem and died on Golgotha for us. It was not faith that loved us, and gave itself for us; that bore our sins in its own body on the tree; that died and rose again for our sins. Faith is one thing, the Saviour is another. Faith is one thing, and the cross is another. Let us not confound them, nor ascribe to a poor, imperfect act of man, that which belongs exclusively to the Son of the Living God.

Faith is not perfection. Yet only by perfection can we be saved; either our own or another's. That which is imperfect cannot justify, and an imperfect faith could not in any sense be a righteousness. If it is to justify, it must be perfect. It must be like "the Lamb, without blemish and without spot" An imperfect faith may connect us with the perfection of another; but it cannot of itself do aught for us, either in protecting us from wrath or securing the divine acquittal. All faith here is imperfect; and our security is this, that it matters not how poor or weak our faith maybe: if it touches the perfect One, all is well. The touch draws out the virtue that is in Him, and we are saved. The slightest imperfection in our faith, if faith were our righteousness, would be fatal to every hope. But the imperfection of our faith, however great, if faith be but the approximation or contact between us and the fulness of the Substitute, is no hindrance to our participation of His righteousness. God has asked and provided a perfect righteousness; He nowhere asks nor expects a perfect faith. An earthenware pitcher can convey water to a traveler's thirsty lips as well as one of gold; nay, a broken vessel, even if there be but "a sherd to take water from the pit" (Isa 30:14), will suffice. So a feeble, very feeble faith, will connect us with the righteousness of the Son of God; the faith, perhaps, that can only cry, "Lord, I believe; help mine unbelief."

Faith is not satisfaction to God. In no sense and in no aspect can faith be said to satisfy God, or to satisfy the law. Yet if it is to be our righteousness, it must satisfy. Being imperfect, it cannot satisfy; being human, it cannot satisfy, even though it were perfect. That which satisfies must be capable of bearing our guilt; and that which bears our guilt must be not only perfect, but divine. It is a sin-bearer that we need, and our faith cannot be a sin-bearer. Faith can expiate no guilt; can accomplish no propitiation; can pay no penalty; can wash away no stain; can provide no righteousness. It brings us to the cross, where there is expiation, and propitiation, and payment, and cleansing, and righteousness; but in itself it has no merit and no virtue.

Faith is not Christ, nor the cross of Christ. Faith is not the blood, nor the sacrifice; it is not the altar, nor the laver, nor the mercy-seat, nor the incense. It does not work, but accepts a work done ages ago; it does not wash, but leads us to the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. It does not create; it merely links us to that new thing which was created when the "everlasting righteousness" was brought in (Dan 9:24).

And as faith goes on, so it continues; always the beggar's outstretched hand, never the

rich man's gold; always the cable, never the anchor, the knocker, not the door, or the palace, or the table; the handmaid, not the mistress; the lattice which lets in the light, not the sun.

Without worthiness in itself, it knits us to the infinite worthiness of Him in whom the Father delights; and so knitting us, presents us perfect in the perfection of another. Though it is not the foundation laid in Zion, it brings us to that foundation, and keeps us there, "grounded and settled" (Col 1:23), that we may not be moved away from the hope of the gospel. Though it is not "the gospel," the "glad tidings," it receives these good news as God's eternal verities, and bids the soul rejoice in them; though it is not the burnt-offering, it stands still and gazes on the ascending flame, which assures us that the wrath which should have consumed the sinner has fallen upon the Substitute.

Though faith is not "the righteousness," it is the tie between it and us. It realizes our present standing before God in the excellency of His own Son; and it tells us that our eternal standing, in the ages to come, is in the same excellency, and depends on the perpetuity of that righteousness which can never change. For never shall we put off that Christ whom we put on when we believed (Rom 12:14; Gal 3:27). This divine raiment is "to everlasting." It waxes not old, it cannot be rent, and its beauty fadeth not away.

Nor does faith lead us away from that cross to which at first it led us. Some in our day speak as if we soon got beyond the cross, and might leave it behind; that the cross having done all it could do for us when first we came under its shadow, we may quit it and go forward; that to remain always at the cross is to be babes, not men.

But what is the cross? It is not the mere wooden pole, or some imitation of it, such as Romanists use. These we may safely leave behind us. We need not pitch our tent upon the literal Golgotha, or in Joseph's garden. But the great truth which the cross embodies we can no more part with than we can part with life eternal. In this sense, to turn our back upon the cross is to turn our back upon Christ crucified, — to give up our connection with the Lamb that was slain. The truth is, that all that Christ did and suffered, from the manger to the tomb, forms one glorious whole, no part of which shall ever become needless or obsolete; no part of which can ever leave without forsaking the whole. I am always at the manger, and yet I know that mere incarnation cannot save; always at Gethsemane, and yet I believe that its agony was not the finished work; always at the cross, with my face toward it, and my eye on the crucified One, and yet I am persuaded that the sacrifice there was completed once for all; always looking into the grave, though I rejoice that it is empty, and that "He is not here, but is risen"; always resting (with the angel) on the stone that was rolled away, and handling the grave-clothes, and realizing a risen Christ, nay, an ascended and interceding Lord, yet on no pretext whatever leaving any part of my Lord's life or death behind me, but unceasingly keeping up my connection with Him, as born, living, dying, buried, and rising again, and drawing out from each part some new blessing every day and hour.

Man, in his natural spirit of self-justifying legalism, has tried to get away from the cross of Christ and its perfection, or to erect another cross instead, or to setup a screen of ornaments between himself and it, or to alter its true meaning into something more

congenial to his tastes, or to transfer the virtue of it to some act or performance or feeling of its own. Thus the simplicity of the cross is nullified, and its saving power is denied. For the cross saves completely, or not at all. Our faith does not divide the work of salvation between itself and the cross. It is the acknowledgment that the cross alone saves, and that it saves alone. Faith adds nothing to the cross, nor to its healing virtue. It owns the fulness, and sufficiency, and suitableness of the work done there, and bids the toiling spirit cease from its labours and enter into rest. Faith does not come to Calvary to do anything. It comes to see the glorious spectacle of all things done, and to accept this completion without a misgiving as to its efficacy. It listens to the "It is finished!" of the Sin-bearer, and says, "Amen." Where faith begins, there labour ends, — labour, I mean, "for" life and pardon. Faith is rest, not toil. It is the giving up all the former weary efforts to do or feel something good, in order to induce God to love and pardon; and the calm reception of the truth so long rejected, that God is not waiting for any such inducements, but loves and pardons of His own goodwill, and is showing that goodwill to any sinner who will come to Him on such a footing, casting away his own performances or goodnesses, and relying implicitly upon the free love of Him who so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son.

Faith is the acknowledgment of the entire absence of all goodness in us, and the recognition of the cross as the substitute for all the want on our part. Faith saves, because it owns the complete salvation of another, and not because it contributes anything to that salvation. There is no dividing or sharing the work between our own belief and Him in whom we believe. The whole work is His, not ours, from the first to last. Faith does not believe in itself, but in the Son of God. Like the beggar, it receives everything, but gives nothing. It consents to be a debtor forever to the free love of God. Its resting-place is the foundation laid in Zion. It rejoices in another, not in itself. Its song is, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by His mercy He saved us."

Christ crucified is to be the burden of our preaching, and the substance of our belief, from first to last. At no time in the saint's life does he cease to need the cross; though at times he may feel that his special need, in spiritual perplexity or the exigency of conflict with evil, may be the incarnation, or the agony in the garden, or the resurrection, or the hope of the promised advent, to be glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believe.

But the question is not, "What truths are we to believe?" but, What truths are we to believe FOR JUSTIFICATION?

That Christ is to come again in glory and in majesty, as Judge and King, is an article of the Christian faith, the disbelief of which would almost lead us to doubt the Christianity of him who disbelieves it. Yet we are not in any sense justified by the second advent of our Lord, but solely by His first. We believe in His ascension, yet our justification is not connected with it. So we believe His resurrection, yet we are not justified by faith in it, but by faith in His death, — that death which made Him at once our propitiation and our righteousness.

"He was raised again on account of our having been justified" (Rom 4:25) is the clear statement of the word. The resurrection was the visible pledge of a justification already

accomplished.

“The power of His resurrection” (Phil 3:10) does not refer to atonement, or pardon, or reconciliation; but to our being renewed in the spirit of our minds, to our being “begotten again unto a living hope, by the resurrection from the dead” (1 Pet 1:3). That which is internal, such as our quickening, our strengthening, our renewing, may be connected with resurrection and resurrection power, but that which is external, such as God’s pardoning, and justifying, and accepting, must be connected with the cross alone.

The doctrine of our being justified by an infused resurrection-righteousness or, as it is called, justification in arisen Christ, is a clear subversion of the Surety’s work when “He died for our sins, according to the Scriptures,” or when “He washed us from our sins in His own blood,” or when He gave us the robes “washed white in the blood of the Lamb.”

It is the blood that justifies (Rom 5:9). It is the blood that pacifies the conscience, purging it from dead works to serve the living God (Heb 9:14). It is the blood that emboldens us to enter through the veil into the holiest, and go up to the sprinkled mercy-seal. It is the blood that we are to drink for the quenching of our thirst (John 6:55). It is the blood by which we have peace with God (Col 1:20). It is the blood through which we have redemption (Eph 1:7), and by which we are brought nigh (Eph 2:13), by which we are sanctified (Heb 13:12). It is the blood which is the seal of the everlasting covenant (Heb 13:20). It is the blood which cleanses (1 John 1:7), which gives us victory (Rev 12:11), and with which we have communion in the Supper of the Lord (1 Cor 10:16). It is the blood which is the purchase-money or ransom of the church of God (Acts 20:28).

The blood and the resurrection are very different things; for the blood is death, and the resurrection is life.

It is remarkable that in the book of Leviticus there is no reference to resurrection in any of the sacrifices. It is death throughout. All that is needed for a sinner’s pardon, and justification, and cleansing, and peace, is there fully set forth in symbol, — and that symbol is death upon the altar. Justification by any kind of infused or inherent righteousness is wholly inconsistent with the services of the tabernacle, most of all justification by an infused, resurrection-righteousness.

The sacrifices are God’s symbolical exposition of the way of a sinner’s approach and acceptance; and in none of these does resurrection hold any place. If justification be in a risen Christ, then assuredly that way was not revealed to Israel; and the manifold offerings so minutely detailed, did not answer the question: How may man be just with God? nor give to the worshippers of old one hint as to the way by which God was to justify the ungodly.

“Christ in us, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27), is a well-known and blessed truth; but Christ IN US, our justification, is a ruinous error, leading man away from a crucified Christ — a Christ crucified FOR US. Christ for us is one truth; Christ in us is quite another. The mingling of these two together, or the transposition of them, is the nullifying of the one finished work of the Substitute. Let it be granted that Christ in us is the source of holiness

and fruitfulness (John 15:4); but let it never be overlooked that first of all there be Christ FOR US, as our propitiation, our justification, our righteousness. The risen Christ in us, our justification, is a modern theory which subverts the cross. Washing, pardoning, reconciling, justifying, all come from the one work of the cross, not from resurrection. The dying Christ completed the work for us from which all the above benefits flow. The risen Christ but sealed and applied what, three days before, He had done once for all.

It is somewhat remarkable that in the Lord's Supper (as in the passover) there is no reference to resurrection. The broken body and the shed blood are the Alpha and Omega of that ordinance. In it we have communion (not with Christ as risen and glorified, but) with the body of Christ and the blood of Christ (1 Cor 10:16), that is, Christ upon the cross. "This do in remembrance of me." "As oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come." If, after we have been at the cross, we are to pass on and leave it behind us, as no longer needed, seeing we are justified by the risen Christ in us, let those who bold that deadly error say why all reference to resurrection should be excluded from the great feast; and why the death of the Lord should be the one object presented to us at the table.

"Life in a risen Christ" is another way of expressing the same error. If by this were only meant that resurrection has been made the channel or instrument through which the life and justification are secured for us on and by the cross, — as when the apostle speaks of our being begotten again unto a lively hope by the "resurrection of Christ from the dead," or when we are said to be "risen with Christ," — one would not object to the phraseology. But when we find it used as expressive of dissociation of these benefits from the cross, and derivation of them from resurrection soley, then do we condemn it as untrue and anti-scriptural. For concerning this 'life' let us hear the words of the Lord: "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:51), "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (John 6:53-56). This assuredly is not the doctrine of "life in a risen Christ," or "a risen Christ in us, our justification and life." I do not enter on the exposition of these verses. I simply cite them.. They bear witness to the cross. They point to the broken body and shed blood as our daily and hourly food, our life-long feast, from which there comes into us the life which the Son of man, by His death, has obtained for us. That flesh is life-impacting, that blood is life-impacting; and this not once, but for evermore.

It is not incarnation on the one hand, nor is it resurrection on the other, on which we are thus to feed, and out of which this life comes forth; it is that which lies between these two, — death, — the sacrificial death of the Son of God. It is not the personality nor the life-history of the Christ of God which is the special quickener and nourishment of our souls, but the blood-shedding. Not that we are to separate the former from the latter, but still it is on the latter that we are specially to feed, and this all the days of our lives.

"Christ, our passover, has been sacrificed for us." Hence we rest, protected by the paschal blood, and feeding on the paschal lamb, with its unleavened bread and bitter herbs, from

day to day. "Let us keep the feast" (1 Cor 5:8). Wherever we are, let us keep it. For we carry our passover with us, always ready, always fresh. With girded loins and staff in hand, as wayfarers, we move along, through the rough or the smooth of the wilderness, our face toward the land of promise.

That paschal lamb is CHRIST CRUCIFIED. As such He is our protection, our pardon, our righteousness, our food, our strength, our peace. Fellowship with Him upon the cross is the secret of a blessed and holy life.

We feed on that which has passed through the fire; on that which has come from the altar. No other food can quicken or sustain the spiritual life of a believing man. The unbroken body will not suffice; nor will the risen or glorified body avail. The broken body and shed blood of the Son of God form the viands on which we feast; and it is under the shadow of the cross that we sit down to partake of these, and find refreshment for our daily journey, strength for our hourly warfare. His flesh is meat indeed; His blood is drink indeed.