

The Traveling Pulpit

Published By



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In this edition of *The Traveling Pulpit*, I would like to begin sharing with you a message that I preached at the Tri-State Particular Baptist Ministers Meeting held at the Beacon Baptist Church in Burlington, NC, on June 7th of last year. The subject that was assigned to me was taken from a quote by Martin Luther. It is a quote of which we need to be reminded today. Due to the length of this message it will appear in two parts and will be continued in our next quarterly publication in April.

Justification by Faith, The Mark of a Standing or Fallen Church **(Part I)**

“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: 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. 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.” Rom. 3:21-28

Introduction

From the book of Revelation, we’re told what we can expect from the institutionalized visible church (Rev. 2-3). The “seven candlesticks” (Rev. 1:20) depict “seven” different types of “churches” that can be found in existence until the end of time. Out of the “seven”, only two went without rebuke from the Lord, “Smyrna”, the persecuted church (Rev. 2:8-11), and “Philadelphia”, the faithful church (Rev. 3:7-13). Without going into detail concerning these “seven churches”, I only mention them to say that, God forewarned us as to the state of most organized assemblies. From the “seven” mentioned, it’s recorded that “Laodicea”, the Christless Church, made God so sick that He would “spue” (spit/vomit) it out of His “mouth” (Rev. 3:16).

Throughout history, the true church, the Bride and Body of Christ, has been bombarded with satanic assaults, including the temptation to bit the devil's bait of compromise in the area of doctrinal purity. A good example of this in our lifetime can be seen in how the charismatic movement had a tendency to diminish doctrinal distinctives for the sake of a common basis in experience. It's sad, but true, that modern Evangelicalism has departed from its historic roots and is redefining itself doctrinally. The modern seeker-sensitive church movement downplays doctrine for mere entertainment, motivational speeches, and philosophical principles. It's not uncommon in today's church to find sermonites for Christianites instead of an exposition of Bible doctrine. Denominations exist because of doctrinal distinctives, many of which should NOT hinder us from Christian fellowship. However, there are some doctrines upon which there can be no compromise and justification by faith alone in Christ alone is one of them.

The doctrine of JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE is central to those who consider themselves historic evangelicals. Without this doctrine, there would be no Reformed theology, but it is a doctrine that is shared in some measure with various Christian denominations. During the Reformation, it was Martin Luther who spoke of this doctrine and said that it is, "the article with and by which the church stands, without which it falls." I believe that Luther was correct and that his statement applies to any organized assembly that considers itself a church. Luther went on to say that JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE "is the head and the cornerstone. It alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God; and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour."

With this brief background, allow me to briefly ask and seek to answer three questions before examination of our text.

First, What is the Meaning of Justification?

The word justification is a legal term used to describe a favorable verdict in a trial. It means to acquit or to declare righteous (Rom. 4:2, 5, 5:1) as it depicts a courtroom scene with God presiding as the Judge Who determines the faithfulness of each person to the law. In the first few verses of Romans, chapter 3, Scripture declares that no one can withstand God's judgment because we are all lawbreakers (Rom. 3:9-20). God's law was not given to justify sinners, but to expose man's sinfulness. Only the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ on the sinner's behalf can appease the righteousness of God and when we trust Christ in faith, God imputes His righteousness to us and declares us righteous before Him.

The question upon which the Reformation focused was, "HOW IS A PERSON JUSTIFIED?" Since justification involves a legal judgment by God in whom He declares that a sinner is made just, the next question that we raise is, "On what grounds does God declare anyone just?" Does this mean that a man must do something to appease God before he can be declared just or does God declare us just while still in a sinful state? John Calvin gives the answer by saying, "we simply interpret justification, as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favour as if we were righteous." There is absolutely nothing the sinner can do to provoke God to make him righteous, but simply trust the sovereign grace of the Almighty alone.

Secondly, What does it mean to be justified by Faith?

The Reformed doctrine of justification is often referred to as forensic justification. Biblical justification is a divine verdict of declaring that the sinner is not guilty, but fully righteous.

Previously, the sinner was condemned, but God in His grace, reverses the judgment against him. The word “forensic” is often associated with criminal trials where forensic evidence is brought to light. It’s a word that refers to legal declarations; therefore, the use of the word along with justification means that God has declared the sinner righteous in a legal sense (Rom. 4-5). The ground for this declaration is the imputed righteousness of Christ to our sin account whereby the sinner is considered just in the sight of God. Believers have a divine attorney defending us against the accuser of the brethren before the bar of justice in the court of heaven.

Herein stands a great contrast to Roman Catholicism that believes one must become righteous before God can declare him such. It’s true that a justified person must possess righteousness in order to be declared righteous. But, the question that divides us is the manner in which a sinner acquires God’s righteousness and that was the heart of the Reformation controversy. The Roman Catholic doctrine of justification is extremely complex and confusing. It was the controversy over indulgences that provoked Luther to write his 95 Theses dealing with the concept of works. He came to the conclusion that the only merit that can avail for the sinner’s justification is the merit of Christ. The Roman Catholic Church believes that grace, faith, and Christ are all necessary for the sinner’s salvation, but that works must be added for justification to occur and that righteousness be infused into the soul by the observing of sacraments. Missing from the Roman Catholic formula for justification is the word, ALONE. Therefore, for a church to stand on solid ground at the foot of the cross, it must believe that justification is by grace ALONE, by faith ALONE, and through Christ ALONE.

Thirdly, What does it mean to be justified by Faith alone?

The only means by which a sinner can receive the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ is faith, a true faith, that is a gift of God resulting from a divine work of regeneration. A sinner must be made righteous in order to be justified and only the merit of Jesus Christ will satisfy the demands of God’s justice. As the Old Testament pictured it so vividly in the scapegoat, our sins were transferred to Christ by imputation at which time God counted His sufferings as acceptable payment for our guilt. Man has no contribution to make toward his salvation whatsoever and to think otherwise is biblical error. It makes a great deal of difference to believe that justification rest within the sinner or it is accomplished for the sinner. It’s not a matter of cooperating with the righteousness that Christ has infused within the sinner, whether it be baptism or any other religious ritual. But simply trusting in what Christ has done for us in living a perfect life of holiness, His obedience to the Father, and His atoning death on the cross.

A close examination of what both James and Paul were talking about helps to clear up some misunderstanding concerning “works” and justification. It sounds like James is saying that a man is “justified ... by works” and “not by faith only” (Jam. 2:24), then it sounds like Paul is saying that a man is “justified by faith” apart from “works” of the “law” (Rom. 3:27-28). Both men appealed to “Abraham” in giving evidence of what they were saying (Jam. 2:23, Rom. 4:1-3). However, to understand what both were saying, we need to see that Paul was expounding the doctrine of justification and making it clear that it is by “faith” and not “works.”

By using “Abraham” in Genesis 15, Paul points out that he was counted righteous by God the moment he believed and prior to any “works” of obedience. On the other hand, James used the offering of Isaac by “Abraham” in Genesis 22 to show that a person is not “justified” by a mere profession of faith, but that genuine “faith” will manifest itself in righteous “works.” James

declares that “Abraham” proved his claim to “faith” by his demonstration of good “works” and Paul states that “Abraham” could bear evidence of such because it was God alone Who “justified” him. The Reformers said is well, “justification is by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone.”

True faith will always manifest itself in “works”, “works” that flow out of “faith”, but are never the ground of our justification. Man’s work can contribute NO merit to him being justified before God, simply because the only basis of the sinners justification is the merit of Christ alone. Man’s “faith” is a gift of God’s grace that proceeds from a divine work of regeneration at which time the sinner is made just before a holy and righteous God (Gal. 5:22).

Sanctification begins the moment the sinner is justified, meaning that the process of becoming righteous has begun. Justification is distinct from sanctification because in justification, God does not make the sinner righteous, He declares him righteous. Justification is an event; sanctification is a process that imparts righteousness. Although, justification and sanctification are different, they cannot be separated

A truly justified person has been legally declared righteous, is a transformed person in whom the Holy Spirit resides and enables to bear the fruit of “faith” and if there is no evidence of faith, then there is no justification. Rome teaches that justification is the result of faith plus works. Antinomianism teaches justification by faith minus works. Reformed theology teaches that justification is the result of faith alone that always produces godly works. The problem of indulgences might have led Martin Luther to nail his 95 Theses to the church door in Whittenberg, on Oct. 31, 1517, but his even greater concern was the doctrine of justification by faith alone. The doctrine of justification has been called the storm-center of the Reformation. From the inspired writings of the apostle Paul, it was the very heart of the Gospel.

A MINISTRY UPDATE

As we begin a new year, there comes a name change to this publication. In the past, it has been called “*The Circuit Rider*”, but henceforth, it will be known as “*The Traveling Pulpit*.” From this printed “pulpit”, I would like to continue sharing with you the mighty truths of God’s Word and trust that it will be a blessing to those who hunger for such a study. As always, thank you for your support of this ministry. Because of His Sovereign Grace.....BWM

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