

THE FAITH OF JESUS

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Sometimes we say that we are saved by our faith in Christ, and we want to emphasize this so we don't lapse into the idea that we are saved by our works. But again we want to be careful that we grasp the truth accurately. Truth saves. Said Jesus, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Error produces the lethal lukewarmness that permeates the church of the Laodiceans (Rev. 3:14-21).

Let me make two statements and you decide which of the two is closer to the truth: (1) justification is by faith, or (2) justification is by grace.

If you are perplexed, note what Ephesians 2:8, 9 says: "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast." That's true; it's impossible that our faith could even exist were it not for grace being first. Our faith is a response to God's grace. So, we are saved by grace, but the instrument, through which we receive and appreciate that grace, is our faith. And when the text says we are saved by grace, the "we" must mean the human race, because God's grace is not doled out selectively according to whether people do something good to deserve it, or not.

His grace is given to all as freely as air circulates around the globe. Christ has become the second Adam, reversing the "condemnation" that the first Adam brought upon the entire human race. Thus

He gives, not merely offers, His grace to everyone alike. Many despise His grace, and choose to rebel, but whenever someone believes, he is simply responding to the initiative that Christ has taken in his salvation.

Now, back to our question: are we justified by grace, just as we are saved by grace?

Justification and forgiveness are the same; and we read often in the Bible that God's forgiveness has preceded our need for it. For example, when wicked people crucified the Son of God, He did not wait for them to repent first; He prayed, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Before Peter denied Him Christ forgave him. In becoming the new Head of our human race, Christ took us into Himself; He took our sin into Himself, and died to pay its penalty; and the death He died was what the Bible calls the real thing, the second death. And this is the only reason why God can treat the human race as though they had never sinned. If He were to treat us as we deserve we would die immediately. We are all subjects of grace!

One wise writer has said that by His sacrifice, Christ has pronounced a "reprieve" upon us; and that is what Paul says: just as Adam brought upon us all a "judicial . . . verdict of condemnation," so Christ has pronounced on us a "judicial . . . verdict of acquittal" (Rom. 5:15-18, NEB). All, by grace! And our faith becomes the instrument whereby we receive and appreciate this grace, so then we are "justified by faith."

God's people in the last days are distinguished in Revelation as those who demonstrate two great

identification marks: they (1) “keep the commandments of God and (2) the faith of Jesus” (14:12). The former is not possible to “do” except by the latter. But it never was their faith; it was something they have received from Jesus.

Thus we are not saved by *our* faith in Jesus, but by *His* faith. He alone is “the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). That is, in all the 6000 years of human history Christ is the one Man who has totally believed the saving truth. His faith alone works by love (Gal. 5:6).

He is the one and only human being who has fully experienced what it is to be “forsaken” of God (Matt. 27:46). No one else has been capable of sensing to the full what that means; it was He alone who has been “made . . . to be sin for us who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). Therefore, no one else has ever “tasted” lostness as fully as He did as He hung on that cross in the darkness. It was *His* faith that saved Him from eternal despair! God saw fit to record the story in Psalm 22 (and also 69).

The faith that we are to exercise is therefore second-hand; we got it from Him! Rightly defined, it is a heart-appreciation of what it cost Christ to save us; it is to “comprehend with all saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love [*agape*] of Christ which passes knowledge” (Eph. 3:18, 19). Our salvation is in “comprehending.”

The faith of Jesus is the only one under heaven that promises eternal salvation to anyone who will simply *look* to Him. It sounds fantastic, but here it is:

“Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isa. 45:22).

When in the desert after being led out of Egypt, the Israelites murmured against God’s care and against His leading, poisonous snakes bit them. The poor people imagined that God had sent those poisonous snakes (Num. 21:5-7). What did He do to save them?

He had Moses make a snake out of the metal they had and put it on a pole and hold it up; then anybody who would simply *look* could be saved (Num. 21:8ff).

It took a repentant, humble heart for anyone with a murmuring, unbelieving heart to decide to look; Jesus told the story to Nicodemus on his night visit, and applied the lesson to Himself so we can have it:

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:14, 15). He equated “believing” in Himself with their looking.

It’s a Bible truth: Hebrews 12:3 urges us, “Consider Him . . .” Same idea; harness your thought processes and fix them on the story of Jesus. “Think of Him” says the NEB. Unlock the door of your soul and admit the thought of Jesus; ponder Him; meditate on Him; stay on your knees quiet—put from your mind that thought of hitting the button on your remote: leave it, and stay there in the darkness alone with the Son of God, your eyes closed. That’s what Jesus means when He invites us, “enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut

thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret” (Matt. 6:6).

If you can't think what to say, keep quiet, but stay there. If all you can say is, “Father! Father . . . !” Just stay there. Stay. You desperately need this moment of looking to Him alone.

You are not worried now about getting to heaven at last; you are beginning to remember that time when you will be alone in the personal presence of Jesus.

You are tasting a bit of what heaven will be like: thank Him.

We think it's a grand achievement when we can learn to have faith in Jesus; we “have passed from death unto life,” etc. But what about Jesus Himself having faith in human beings? That's backward thinking! We trust Him, ah yes! But does He trust us? What is there trustworthy about us? And why would He need to trust us, even if we were trustworthy? He has everything, billions of angels at His beck and call, infinite resources. In answer, the Bible does say that He believes in us and trusts us, in fact, He has to if He is ever to win the great controversy with Satan. Paul asks, “What if some [Israelites] did not believe? Shall their non-faith [unbelief] make the faith of God without effect?” (Rom. 3:3). When the heavenly Father sent His only begotten Son into the world as a baby, did He not trust human beings to care for Him, especially while He was an infant? Did He not trust the virgin Mary to be a faithful mother to Jesus? Did God not trust friends to care for Jesus during the years that He lived with us on this planet? (Yes, people did crucify

Him, but we read of women who prepared food for Him, took care of His laundry, and friends who invited Him to be a Guest in their homes, like Lazarus and Zaccheus of Jericho).

And we read of how “the faith of Jesus” comes into focus in the last days: “Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12). In fact, it is the “faith of Jesus” that saves us, for He is “the author . . . of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). When He died on the cross and He felt forsaken by His Father, His faith triumphed. For at the last just before He cried out, “Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit,” He chose to believe and to trust that there would be a multitude of human beings around the world who would respond to the truth of His sacrifice, and who would believe and be loyal to Him: “All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee. For the kingdom is the Lord's. . . . A seed shall serve Him” (Psalm 22:25-30). He forgot about His own reward; what made Him happy in those last moments was the confidence that He had won the battle, the contest was decided, and we will live forever in God's kingdom now made forever sure. Here was His total emptying of self! When He “tasted death for every man” (Heb. 2:9), it was the real thing; He died our second death. But He was happy in the confidence that He had saved us from it.

Addiction is a problem to multitudes: it can be of alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, gambling, pornography,

sex, even the for-some-people uncontrollable addiction to kill people. Scientists experiment with alternative drugs to ameliorate the problems. “Just say ‘No!’” doesn’t work, is the view of many. Some demon-like force works within the blood stream or in the nervous system or in the brain to drive the victim to distraction unless his/her urge is satisfied by another indulgence. Then when the craving is temporarily satisfied, the addict often longs for release until the mysterious craving returns and must again be satisfied. Is it a pious, naive truism just to say “Jesus saves”? Is it faith in Him, or is it His faith, that is truly the practical solution to these apparently incurable addictions? The Bible says the faith *of* Jesus is the answer: “He is also able to save to the uttermost [completely] those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25, NKJV). There will be a people in the last days who do overcome “to the uttermost,” for they are a people who “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12).

Is the preposition “of” important? These victorious people “come to [God] through Jesus,” and they “keep [that is, grasp firmly] the faith of Jesus.” It doesn’t say, “faith in Jesus,” good as that may be. They have found and they keep something that is peculiar to Jesus, that is of Him, that is His—His faith. Obviously, they get this precious commodity from Him, for it is “through Him” that this effective salvation “to the uttermost” is realized. They identify themselves with Him, for they say, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ

liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). It is the most sure and certain truth in heaven and earth: let the addict of whatever kind identify with Christ on His cross, and “henceforth” the life he/she will live “in the flesh” will be that of Christ (2 Cor. 5:14, 15).

Have you ever been close to losing your life, either from sickness or an accident? And you have realized that your life has been an undeserved bonus?

The faith of Jesus in God’s plan of justification teaches that lesson in its truest dimension: “The love [*agape*] of Christ constrains us; because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died” (2 Cor. 5:14). It’s so obvious that you wonder you didn’t see it long ago:

(1) Christ died for the world, for everyone (1 Cor. 15:3). That’s true.

(2) It’s equivalent to saying that if He had not “died for all,” then all would themselves have had to die.

(3) In other words, death would have been the inevitable end of everyone, “all,” because “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Sin kills; the poison sting is in the sin itself. The end has always been wrapped up in the sinning. It’s not an arbitrary, malicious condemnation on the part of God.

(4) That “death” is what Jesus described in our beloved text of John 3:16—to “perish.” As $2 + 2 = 4$, the logic is inescapable: if “One” “perished” in place of all perishing, then He saved “all” from perishing, and “all” can see themselves in a new light: they

have escaped that terrible fate because of how He “perished” for them.

(5) The death that Jesus died is the “perishing” kind—what the Bible says is “the second death” (Rev. 2:11; 20:14). You came within a hair’s breadth of suffering it yourself, except that Christ “perished” in it for you. That’s the death He died.

(6) Now you are “constrained” to deny self and to live only for Him. Now “easy” to be saved and “hard” to be lost make sense—all because of that “love” (*agape*).

It crops up all the time—laments from church-goers who say they have gone to church for decades and heard legalism preached. But now they rejoice that the gospel of “righteousness by faith” is proclaimed. Thank God for any true change for the better!

But are there different kinds of “righteousness by faith”? Revelation 14 presents an “everlasting gospel” that validates itself by raising up people who truly “keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” They prepare for the literal second coming of Christ (6-15). The author of the Book of Revelation also writes a series of warnings against false claims of “righteousness by faith” in which “we lie, and do not the truth;” “we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us;” “we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.” “He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in Him” (1 John 1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, etc.).

Apparently the apostle John wants us to discern any “gospel” that does not produce obedience to all the commandments of God (all ten!). A preacher

who says he is proclaiming the “gospel” but himself continues to “break one of these least commandments, and . . . teach[es] men so,” says Jesus, could be a highly sophisticated deception, yet not realize who he is (see Matt. 5:19).

But if those who say they belong in Revelation 14 and let themselves be fooled by a counterfeit “righteousness by faith,” they are pretty dumb. The true “everlasting gospel” must produce obedience to all those commandments in the one himself who preaches it.

Is this concern a reversal again to “legalism”? “The everlasting gospel” of Revelation 14 is no legalism; it is a clearer understanding of the cross of Christ than has ever “lightened the earth with glory” (see its full development in Rev. 18:1-4).

The final crisis will be two opposite views of “righteousness by faith.” One will spin the Emperor’s New Clothes, multitudes rejoicing in “imputed righteousness” but not noticing it’s not imparted. “Covered” by what they assume is a spiritual insurance policy, they will go for “the mark of the beast,” which will be the most sophisticated counterfeit of “the everlasting gospel” the world has ever seen.

It’s time to seek some “eyesalve” that can impart discernment (see Rev. 3:18).

“The faith of the Son of God” is the faith by which He Himself defeated Satan in His human flesh. That flesh which Jesus “took” is the same that we all have inherited—fallen, sinful; but Jesus “condemned sin in the flesh,” the “flesh” in which the Father sent Him (Rom. 8:3). In Christ, self was

crucified long before He was nailed to His cross at the end. Even as a Boy of twelve He demonstrated that He had said “No!” to self, and “Yes!” to His Father (cf. Luke 2:49). Constantly He said, “I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me”; “I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me”; in Gethsemane He cried, “O My Father, not as I will, but as You will” (this, at the price of sweating blood, John 5:30, 6:38, Matt. 26:39). One who believes in Jesus truly, will open his heart to receive “the faith of Jesus” and will also “condemn sin” in his own fallen, sinful flesh. It can be done by “the faith OF Jesus,” and it will be done in those “144,000” who prepare for the second coming of Jesus (cf. Rev. 14:1-6).

“‘The faith of Jesus.’ It is talked of, but not understood. What constitutes the faith of Jesus, that belongs to the third angel’s message? Jesus becoming our sin-bearer that He might become our sin-pardoning Saviour. He was treated as we deserve to be treated. He came to our world and took our sins that we might take His righteousness. And faith in the ability of Christ to save us amply and fully and entirely is the faith of Jesus” (3SM 172.3).

The price? A Gethsemane-like struggle suited exactly to “the measure of faith” which God has “dealt to each one” of us (Rom. 12:3). Satan’s attacks will be terrible; but like the 30-hour bombardment of Baltimore’s Ft. McHenry in the War of 1812, when the smoke cleared away and “our flag was still there,” the seal of God like a flag

will still be flying over each one’s personal “fort” that has endured Satan’s merciless bombardment.