

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480)833-7500

Website: www.churchredeemeraz.org

Series: Reformation Sunday

Text: Romans 3:21 – 31; Galatians 3:1-14

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Pastor/Teacher
Gary L. W. Johnson

THE ONLY WAY OF JUSTIFICATION

Allein durch den glauben, this is how Luther translated that key phrase in our text in his German Bible. His Roman Catholic opponents accused him of grossly perverting the Scripture by inserting the word *allein* (alone) into the text. Charles Hodge points out that Catholic translations, long before Luther, had rendered the passage the same way. *The Nuremberg Bible* of 1483 reads *Nur* (only) *durch den glauben* and even more surprising is the *Italian Bibles* of Geneva (1476) and Venice (1538) read *per sola fide*.¹ Luther responded to his critics by saying, “Note, then, whether Paul does not assert more vehemently that faith alone justifies than I do, although he does not use the word alone (*sola*), which I have used. For he who says: Works do not justify, but faith justifies, certainly affirms more strongly that faith justifies than does he who says: Faith alone justifies... It is ridiculous enough to argue in this sophistical manner: Faith alone justifies; therefore the Holy Spirit does not justify. Or: The Spirit justifies; therefore not faith alone. For this is not what the dispute is about at this place. Rather the question is only about the relation of faith and works, whether anything is to be ascribed to works in justification. Since the apostle does not ascribe anything to them, he without a doubt ascribes all to faith alone.”² Strange as it would appear, Luther’s critics today include people who claim to be the true heirs of Calvin and the real representatives of the Reformed faith. Norman Shepherd (and his followers in *The Federal Vision*, i.e., Rich Lusk) contends that a genuine Reformed understanding of justification is substantively different than Luther’s.³ In fact, Shepherd is of the opinion that Luther’s German translation of Rom. 3:28, “actually distorts Paul’s meaning.”⁴ Why? Because this would, in Shepherd’s mind “cancel out the teaching of James,” (2:24).⁵ Was Luther, as Roman Catholics, Norman Shepherd, and the New Perspective contend, distorting the Apostle’s meaning? Or was Luther (and the rest of the Reformers) right by insisting that justification before God is by faith alone – standing without *any* assistance – *nothing* else required?⁶

I.

FAITH ALONE, NOT FAITH PLUS WORKS

From Romans 3:27 to 4:25 Paul expounds the truth of justification by faith alone. Before this can be considered, there is a preliminary matter that needs to be settled. It is this: Does Paul teach justification by works in Romans 2:5-16? Shepherd and his followers (Armstrong and Lusk have gone on record in support of this position as well⁷) claim that this is exactly what the text teaches. It must be said immediately, that if this were the case, he would be contradicting his main teaching from chapter 3:20 to 5:1. But Paul is not dealing with salvation or the subject of justification at this point. It is the grim, dark picture of the day of wrath and condemnation, when God will judge every single person by his Son Jesus Christ that is in view. He is not talking of justification but of judgment. On that day of judgment justice will be scrupulously fair for both Jew and Gentile. The mere possession of the law of God by the Jew will not put them in an advantageous position, “it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous” (Romans 2:13). That is the only reason for mentioning justification. He is not making any further point from the reference. It may well be possible in theory for a person to achieve justification by doing God’s revealed will. In our Lord’s case, theory turned to actuality for he was justified on account of his righteous life (I Timothy 3:16). But as far as the whole human race “in Adam” is concerned, it is impossible. Paul’s further point is that God judges according to standards of which, whether Jew or Gentile, we are all aware. The standard will either be the revealed law of God or the consciousness of

right and wrong felt by humanity generally. By those standards all are condemned. No one has ever lived up to their own standards, let alone the perfect standard of God himself revealed in his law and in the life of Jesus. The *locus classicus* for the Reformed teaching on God's demand for perfect and perpetual obedience is Galatians 3:10. There the apostle Paul cites Deuteronomy 27:26 in an attempt to prove that justification is by faith, not by works. If justification were by our law-keeping (works) then a man would have to keep the entirety of the Law. This is the reason why Paul appeals to Deut. 27:26, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things written in the Law of God to do them." Schreiner, in his article "*Is Perfect Obedience to the Law Possible,*" notes the following important observation about Galatians 3:10: It is unlikely, therefore, that in Gal. 3:10 Paul cited Deut. 27:26 because the latter condemned the sin of legalism. The simplest way of reading the quotation, and it is one that accords with the OT context, is that Paul is saying that there is a curse on anyone who does not observe the law entirely. Such an interpretation is strengthened when one observes that Paul, in basic agreement with the LXX, uses a Scripture text that pronounces a curse on anyone who does not abide by all things (*pasin*) written in the book of the law, to do them. It is very important to note that the MT does not have any word in Deut. 27:26 that corresponds to the word *pasin* in Gal. 3:10. It is fair to conclude, therefore, that Paul's use of the word *pasin* clearly implies that the curse was pending if one did not observe any part of the law. The $\pi\alpha\sigma\iota\nu\ \tau\omicron\iota\iota\varsigma$ of Galatians 3:10 makes it undeniable that God demanded perfect and unbroken obedience to the Law. The legal demand for perfect obedience did not pass away with the fall of Adam. God is holy, and a holy God must continue to demand perfect obedience to His own holy standard. If God did not demand perfect obedience to His Law then He would deny His own holy nature. As Cornelius Van Til noted, "What God says is right because He says it, and He says it because it rests on His own holy nature." Even in eternity, God will demand perfect moral obedience to His holy law.⁸ Jew and Gentile are therefore in the same position. All are condemned, all are under the wrath of God and all are in need of salvation. We are all sinners by nature and by practice. It follows from this that keeping the law of God will not put a human being right before God (Romans 3:27-4:25). Even to belong to the nation specially chosen by God, to be a member of God's covenant people, carrying out the duties and requirements of the law, does not mean one is necessarily righteous in God's sight. Seeking to obey the law and, in the case of sinful lapses, religiously observing the provisions of the law to obtain ritual purification and atonement, is not good enough. Doing all these works of the law to the best of one's ability does not put a person right with God. No one was ever justified by that means.⁹

II. BIBLICAL LOGIC: REASONING FROM THE SCRIPTURES

The testimony of the Apostle is worth noting. In addition to Romans 3:28, he declares, "If Abraham were justified by works, he was whereof to glory, but not before God. For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness" (Romans 4:2-3). "For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect, because the law works wrath; for where no law is, there is no transgression" (Romans 4:14-15). "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ and not by the works of the law, for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Galatians 2:16). "Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid. For if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the Scripture has concluded all under sin, that the promise by the faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe" (Galatians 3:21-22). "For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ" (Philippians 3:8-9). Titus 3:5-7, and II Timothy 1:9, also speaks of the righteousness, which is of God by faith and not by works.

A. A Disjunctive Syllogism

This is a formal category of logic that refers to a sentence of either of the forms such as $A \vee B$, A

+ B (or a proposition expressed by such a sentence). The Puritan William Pemble drew this form of argumentation in light of the Scriptural testimony. “From these places, not to name more, expressly touching this point of our justification, we argue thus: A man is justified either by the works of the law or by faith in Christ. But he is not justified by the works of the law. Ergo, he is justified only by faith in Christ. In this disjunctive syllogism, they cannot find fault with us for adding the word “only” in the conclusion, which was not in the premises. For reason will teach them that the two terms are immediately opposite; if one is taken away, the other remains alone. So in every disjunctive syllogism whose major proposition stands upon two terms immediately opposite, if one term is removed in the proposition, the conclusion is plainly equivalent to an exclusive proposition. For example, we argue thus: either the wicked are saved or the godly. But the wicked are not saved. Thence it follows in exclusive terms that the godly only are saved. Similarly, in this case, our adversaries cannot deny that the proposition (a man is justified either by works or by faith) consists of terms immediately opposite. For otherwise they accuse the Apostle Paul of a lack of logic who should conclude falsely that “a man is justified by faith without works” (Romans 3:28) if he is justified either by both together, or else by neither. Seeing that he opposes faith and works as being incompatible, and excludes works from justification, we conclude infallibly by the Scriptures that a man is justified by faith alone. This argument is not avoidable by any sound answer, and puts our adversaries to the shifts. Yet rather than yield unto the truth, they fall unto their distinctions, whereby, if it were possible, they would shift off the force of this argument. Therefore the Scriptures oppose works and faith, the law of works and the law of faith, our own righteousness, which is of the law, and the righteousness of God by faith. This manifestly tells us that we are justified not by works, by the law of works, nor by our own righteousness of God by faith.”¹⁰

CONCLUSION:

The advocates of The New Perspective on Paul (N. T. Wright) as well as Norman Shepherd and representatives of The Federal Vision (Rich Lusk) share in common with the medieval Roman Catholic Church some very similar positions. We get “in” by grace, but we maintain our “standing” by our personal obedience i.e., justification is two-fold by grace and also ultimately by works. “According to the Council of Trent, one “got in” by baptism, which could hardly be regarded as a human work of the infant. This is the “first justification.” But one’s subsequent status (“second justification”) depended on cooperation with infused grace. “Final justification” referred to the last judgment, which involves a divine weighing of good works against transgressions. The reformers challenged this entire paradigm by insisting that one not only gets in, but stays in by grace *alone*. They realized that the law, which we could *not* fulfill, nevertheless *had* to be fulfilled. Clearly, this involves some notion of merit: either Christ’s or our own personal obedience. Paul’s contrast between “the righteousness which is by the law” and “the righteousness which is by faith” (Romans 10:5-6, *passim*) is that of the reformers as well. Of course, there is a final vindication of God’s elect on Judgment Day, but the point of the doctrine of justification is to say that this eschatological verdict has already been rendered in the present. There are not two verdicts: one dependent on Christ’s obedience, the other on ours - getting in by grace, staying in by obedience.”¹¹ Whatever else Wright, Shepherd and Lusk are advocating, one thing is most certainly true, their positions have more in common with Roman Catholicism than Luther, Calvin and the Reformed confessions. More importantly their views on justification are not the view of Paul and the Apostles. R.C. Sproul has gone on record declaring that the greatest threat confronting the Church today is the new perspective. Why? Because it denies the Reformation’s understanding of imputation. No imputation, no justification by faith alone – thus no gospel.¹²

ENDNOTES

¹ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary On Romans* (rpt. 1972, Banner of Truth), p. 100.

² *What Luther Says: An Anthology II* compiled by E. M. Plass (Concordia, 1959), p. 707.

³ Among those echoing Shepherd’s position on Luther vs. Calvin include Doug Wilson, “A Pauline Take on The New Perspective,” *Credenda/Agenda* (Vol. 15, No. 5); John Armstrong in *Reformation & Revival Journal: Justification: Modern Reflections* (Vol. 11. No. 2, Spring 2002), p. 189. In this same issue articles by P. Andrew Sandlin “Lutheranized Calvinism” and Norman Shepherd “Justification by Faith Alone,” all take this tact. Most astounding is the claim of Shepherd that the Westminster Standards do not use the formula *justification by faith alone*. He says, “Neither the Confession nor the Catechism say that we are justified by faith alone,” (p. 76). He later admits that the WFC *does* declare, “faith is the alone instrument of justification”

(XL:2) but this, he maintains, is a different emphasis because of the way it is worded. This kind of sophistry is exasperating. W. Stanford Reid records he was “very put off with Norman’s conduct of himself in all the discussions which the faculty at Westminster theological seminary had with him. He almost never answered a question frankly or directly. If anyone quoted a statement from the Confession, the catechisms or the Bible, he would always agree, and then go on with one of his “buts”, which virtually nullified the protasis of his statement. If, on the other hand, one asked him a question, almost always he answered by asking a question in return.” *Exasperation* is how Reid and many others felt when dealing with Shepherd. One can see why! A. Donald MacLeod, *W. Stanford Reid: An Evangelical Calvinist in The Academy* (McGill-Queen Univ. Press, 2004), p. 262.

⁴ Shepherd, op. cit. p. 87.

⁵ Ibid. p. 88.

⁶ Calvin agreed wholeheartedly with Luther. He wrote, “Now the reader sees how fairly the Sophists today cavil against our doctrine when we say that man is justified by faith alone [Rom. 3:28]. They dare not deny that man is justified by faith because it recurs so often in Scripture. But since the word “alone” is nowhere expressed, they do not allow this addition to be made. Is it so? But what will they reply to these words of Paul where he contends that righteousness cannot be of faith unless it be free [Rom. 4:2 ff.]? How will a free gift agree with works? With what chicaneries will they elude what he says in another passage, that God’s righteousness is revealed in the gospel [Rom. 1:17]? If righteousness is revealed in the gospel, surely no mutilated or half righteousness but a full and perfect righteousness is contained there. The law therefore has no place in it. Not only by a false, but by an obviously ridiculous shift, they insist upon excluding this adjective. Does not he who takes everything from works firmly enough ascribe everything to faith alone? What, I pray, so these expressions mean: “His righteousness has been manifested apart from the law” [Rom. 3:21 p.]; and, “Man is freely justified” [Rom. 3:24 p.]; and, “Apart from the works of the law” [Rom. 3:28]?” *Institutes of the Christian Religion* trans. F. L. Battles. ed. J. T. McNeill, (Westminster Press, 1975) BK. III, Ch. 11, sec. 19. W. Stanford Reid, a colleague of Shepherd at Westminster was well aware of Shepherd’s efforts to divide the two reformers. As one of the most respected church historians of the 20th cent. Reid marshaled an impressive testimony from Calvin’s own writings to counter Shepherd’s claims. He observed that the position Shepherd was advancing did have historical roots - but it is Richard Baxter and not the Reformers (especially Calvin) that mirror Shepherd’s views. “Richard Baxter and others even came to be known as “new-nomians” because of their stress upon good works, as though they were an aid in obtaining justification. And this attitude has continued in some circles even to our own day, when some Reformed theologians could term the doctrine of justification by faith alone as ‘easy believism’ and insist that such a doctrine is Lutheran rather than Reformed. For these reasons it would seem to be a good thing to look back to one who is recognized as the theologian who largely formulated the basic Reformed doctrines in the sixteenth century. Moreover, that he was a contemporary of Martin Luther and knew exactly what Luther was teaching helps us to understand whether or not he was in favor of Luther’s formulation of the doctrine of justification by faith. If he disagreed, he would certainly have said so, while on the other hand, if he agreed there would also be a clear indication of this fact. Calvin was not hesitant to lay great stress upon the doctrine of ‘justification by faith alone.’ While he admits that the qualifying term is never employed specifically in the Bible, he insists that the concept or idea is implicit in such passages as Romans 4:2ff; 1:17; 3:21; Galatians 3:10ff. The editor of the most recent English edition of the *Institutes* points out in a footnote how often in 3:17:7, 8, 10 the term ‘faith alone’ is repeated. God is propitious to us as soon as we by faith rest ‘on the blood of Christ,’ a phrase which he explains to mean the ‘whole work of expiation.’ Thus since faith alone is the means by which one receives justification and reconciliation to God, the merit of every work ‘falls to the ground.’ Therefore, if justification by faith alone is a specifically Lutheran doctrine, we must put Calvin in the Lutheran rather than in the Reformed camp.” W. Stanford Reid, “Justification By Faith According to John Calvin,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* (Vol. XLII, No. 2, Spring 1980), pp. 290, 296

⁷ Cf. John Armstrong, *Reformation & Revival: The Weekly Messenger* (April 15, 2004), p. 6 and Rich Lusk, “A Response to the Biblical Plan of Salvation” in *The Auburn Avenue Theology: Pros & Cons: Debating The Federal Vision* ed. C. Beisner (Knox Seminary, 2004), pp. 145-146. Shepherd et. al. are always quick to add that these works are strictly speaking “non-meritorious,” but as pointed out in the series on Romans, simply calling our obedience/works “non-meritorious” does not make it so! Reid wrote, “He (Shepherd) also speaks of ‘obedient faith... as a necessary, but certainly not meritorious condition for being in a state of salvation and thus in a state of justification.’ It is very well for him to say that obedience is not meritorious although necessary, but how does he distinguish this? To my mind this is exactly where Arminianism, if not Pelagianism starts. It gives man some input into his justification, and that by all Reformed standards is out.” op. cit. p. 264. In the preface to John Owen’s famous work on Justification, William H. Goold (in 1853) noted that in Owen’s time there existed a position similar to that being set forth by Shepherd and his followers [compare with Reid’s observations in endnote 6]. Writing in reference to Richard Baxter, he observed, “Rightly conceiving that the essence of the question lay in the nature of justification, he (Baxter) published in 1649 his “Aphorisms on Justification,” in opposition to the Antinomian tendencies of the day, and yet designed to accommodate the prevailing differences; on terms, however, that were held to compromise the gratuitous character of justification. He had unconsciously, by a recoil common in every attempt to reconcile essentially antagonistic principles, made a transition from the ground of justification by faith, to views clearly opposed to it. Though his mind was the victim of a false theory, his heart was practically right; and he subsequently modified and amended his views. But to his “Aphorisms” Bishop Barlow traces the first departure from the received doctrine of the Reformed churches on the subject of justification. In 1669, Bishop Bull published his “Apostolical Harmony,” with the view of reconciling the apostles Paul and James. There is no ambiguity in regard to his views as to the ground of a sinner’s acceptance with God. According to Bull, “faith denotes the whole condition of the gospel covenant; that is, comprehends in one word all the works of Christian piety.” It is the just remark of Bickersteth, that “under the cover of justification by faith, this is in reality justification by works.” *The Works of John Owen* V (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1974), p. 3.

⁸ Nicholas T. Batzig, *The Justification of Imputation* <http://feedingonchrist.com/the-justification-of-imputation>

⁹ I have condensed this section from Philip Everson, *The Great Exchange: Justification By Faith Alone in the Light of Recent Thought* (Day One, 1996), pp. 22-23.

¹⁰ W. Pemble, *The Justification of a Sinner: A Treatise On Justification By Faith Alone* (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 2002), p. 58.

¹¹ M. Horton. “Déjà vu All Over Again” *Modern Reformation* (July/Aug. 2004). P. 28.

¹² R.C. Sproul, *Tape of the Month, Romans Part I* (Ligonier Ministries, 2008).