

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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| Series: | The Heidelberg Catechism | | Pastor/Teacher |
| Number: | 43 | | Gary L.W. Johnson |
| Text: | Job 4:17; Acts 13:32-39 | | |
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Righteous Before God

23. Lord's Day

Question 60. How are thou righteous before God?

Answer: Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ; (a) so that, though my conscience accuse me, that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, (b) and am still inclined to all evil; (c) notwithstanding, God, without any merit of mine, (d) but only of mere grace, (e) grants and imputes to me, (f) the perfect satisfaction, (g) righteousness and holiness of Christ; (h) even so, as if I never had had, nor committed any sin: yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me; (i) inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart. (j)

(a) Rom. 3:21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Rom. 3:22 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: Rom. 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Rom. 3:24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Rom. 3:25 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; Rom. 3:28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. Rom. 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: Rom. 5:2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Gal. 2:16 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 Jesus 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. Eph. 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Eph. 2:9 Not of works, lest any man should boast. Philip. 3:9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: (b) Rom. 3:9 What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; (c) Rom. 7:23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. (d) Tit. 3:5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Deut. 9:6 Understand therefore, that the LORD thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people. Ezek. 36:22 Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy names's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. (e) Rom. 3:24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Eph. 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of

God: (f) Rom. 4:4 Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. Rom. 4:5 But to him that worth not, but believeth on him that justifieth ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. 2 Cor. 5:19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. (g) 1 John 2:2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. (h) 1 John 2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: (i) 2 Cor. 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. (j) Rom. 3:22 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: John 3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Question 59. Why sayest thou, that thou art righteous by faith only?

Answer: Not that I am acceptable to God, on account of the worthiness of my faith; but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, is my righteousness before God; (a) and that I cannot receive and apply the same to myself any other way than by faith only. (b)

(a) 1 Cor. 1:30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and satisfaction, and redemption: 1 Cor. 2:2 For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. (b) 1 John 5:10 He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

The Reformer's doctrine of justification, as J.I. Packer writes, can be summed up in the following seven points: (1) Every man faces the judgment-seat of God, and must answer to God there for himself; nothing can shield him from this. (2) Every man is a sinner by nature and practice, a nonconformist so far as God's law is concerned, and therefore all he can expect is God's wrath and rejection. Thus far the bad news; now the good news. (3) Justification is God's judicial act of pardoning a guilty sinner, accepting him as righteous, and receiving him as a son and heir. (4) The sole source of justification is God's grace, not man's effort or initiative. (5) The sole ground of justification is Christ's vicarious righteousness and blood-shedding, not our own merit; nor do supposed works of supererogation, purchase of indulgences, or multiplication of masses make any contribution to it; nor do the purgatorial pains of medieval imagination have any significance, or indeed reality, in relation to it. Justification is not the prize to work for, but a gift to be received through Christ. (6) The means of justification, here and now is faith in Christ, understood as a pacifying and energizing trust that Christ's sacrificial death atoned for all one's sins. (7) The fruit of faith, the evidence of its reality and therefore the proof that a man is a Christian as he claims to be, is a manifested repentance and life of good works. The Council of Trent met the Reformers' doctrine by defining justification as inner renewal plus pardon and acceptance and affirming that the "sole formal cause" (*unica formalis causa*) of justification, in both its aspects, was God's righteousness (*iustitia*) imparted through baptism as its instrumental cause. "Formal cause," in the language of the schools, denoted that which gave a thing its quality (thus, heat was the formal cause of a thing being hot, or having the quality of hotness). The Tridentine thesis thus was that the ground of our being pardoned was the quality of actual divine righteousness infused into us: God declares us righteous, not liable to punishment for our sins, because we have been made genuinely righteous in ourselves. In the more biblical terminology of Protestantism, this was to make regeneration, or the start of sanctification, the ground of justification.¹ The great Southern Presbyterian Theologian John Girardeau provides this helpful analysis, The Calvinistic doctrine may be stated under three heads: first, the Ground of Justification; secondly its Constituent Elements, or Nature; thirdly, its human Condition or Instrument.²

I. THE GROUND OF JUSTIFICATION, or, what is the same, its Matter or Material Cause, is the vicarious righteousness of Christ imputed to the believer. This is the obedience of Christ, as the appointed Substitute of the sinner, to the precept and the penalty of the Moral Law: what Paul denominates the righteousness of God, which is revealed from faith to faith. It is fitly termed the righteousness of God, not only because it was provided and accepted by God, but because it was wrought out by God himself in the person of his Incarnate Son. It is God's righteousness because God *produced* it. This is judicially imputed by God the Father to the believing sinner, who had no share at all in its conscious production. In that sense, it is not his, but another's, righteousness – *justitia aliena*. But as Christ was his Surety and Representative and Christ's righteousness was imputed to him, it becomes, in this sense, his righteousness. It is his in law, before the divine tribunal, not the act which apprehends Christ's righteousness *unto* justification. All it does is to take what God gives—Christ and his righteousness: Christ as the justifying Saviour and Christ's righteousness as the only justifying righteousness.

II. THE CONDITION ON MAN'S PART, OR THE INSTRUMENT, OF JUSTIFICATION IS FAITH, AND FAITH ALONE. In receiving Christ, as a justifying Saviour, it receives and rests upon Christ's righteousness, as the ground of justification. God imputes this righteousness and the sinner embraces it by faith. In describing faith as the condition of justification, an indispensable distinction is to be noted. The only meritorious condition of justification was performed by Christ. As the Representative of his people he undertook to furnish that perfect obedience to the precept of the Law which, under the Covenant of Works, was required of Adam as the representative of his seed and which he failed to render, and, in addition, to furnish a perfect obedience to the penalty of the violated law. Upon the fulfillment of this condition the justification of his seed was suspended. This condition he completely fulfilled in his life and in his death, and thus meritoriously secured justification for his seed. But in the application of redemption to the sinner, he is required to exercise faith in Christ and his righteousness, in order to his conscious union with Christ as a Federal Head, and his actual justification. In this sense, faith is to him the condition of his justification. It is simply an indispensable duty on his part—a *conditio sine qua non*. He cannot be consciously and actually justified without faith; but his faith has no particle of merit. All merit is in Christ alone. Faith involves the absolute renunciation of merit, and absolute reliance upon the meritorious obedience of Christ. Faith, then, is simply the instrument by which Christ and his righteousness are received in order to justification. It is emptiness filled with Christ's fullness, impotence lying down upon Christ's strength. It is no righteousness; it is not a substitute for righteousness; it is not imputed as righteousness. It is counted to us simply as the act which apprehends Christ's righteousness unto justification. All it does is to take what God gives—Christ and his righteousness: Christ as the justifying Saviour and Christ's righteousness as the only justifying righteousness.

III. IN DISCHARGING THIS INSTRUMENTAL OFFICE FAITH IS ENTIRELY ALONE. It is followed, and in accordance with the provisions of the covenant of grace it is inevitably followed, by the other graces of the Spirit, and by good, that is, holy works; but they do not cooperate with it in the act by which Christ and his righteousness are received in order to justification. They are not concurring causes, but the certain results of justification. In a word, faith, while not the sole cause for the act of the Spirit uniting the sinner to Christ in regeneration is also a cause, is the sole *instrumental* cause on man's part of justification. Other graces, the existence of which is conditioned by faith may be superior to it in point of intrinsic excellence, love for example; faith has none. All the excellence it possesses is derived from its relation to Christ. Itself it confesses to be nothing, Christ to be everything. It is an exhausted receiver prepared by its very emptiness to be filled with the merit of Christ's righteousness. Hence, it is precisely suited to be the instrument, and the sole instrument, of justification. As all human works whatsoever are excluded from it,

justification is seen to be altogether of grace.

CONCLUSION: The doctrine is stated in the Westminster Confession this way: “Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous: not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone: not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith: which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.” The Larger Catechism puts it this way: “Justification is an act of God’s free grace unto sinners, in which he pardoneth all their sin, accepteth and accounteth their persons righteous in His sight; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone.” Charles Hodge in his *Systematic Theology* writes, “It is frequently said,” he remarks, “that justification consists in the pardon of sin and the imputation of righteousness. This mode of statement is commonly adopted by Lutheran theologians. This exhibition of the doctrine is founded upon the sharp distinction made in the ‘Form of Concord’ between the passive and active obedience of Christ. To the former is referred the remission of the penalty due to us for sin, to the latter our title to eternal life. The Scriptures, however, do not make this distinction so prominent. Our justification as a whole is sometimes referred to the blood of Christ, and sometimes to his obedience. This is intelligible, because the crowning act of his obedience, and that without which all else had been unavailing, was his laying down his life for us. It is, perhaps, more correct to say that the righteousness of Christ, including all he did and suffered in our stead, is imputed to the believer as the ground of his justification, and that the consequences of this imputation are, first, the remission of sin, and secondly, the acceptance of the believer as righteous. And if righteous, then he is entitled to be so regarded and treated.”³ James Henley Thornwell, another of the noted Presbyterian Theologians of the 19th Century, echoes Hodge by stating, “To justify is to pronounce righteous. A holy God cannot, of course, declare that any one is righteous unless he is so. There are no fictions of law in the tribunal of Heaven—all its judgments are according to truth. A man may be righteous because he has done righteousness, and then he is justified by law; or he may be righteous because he has received righteousness as a gift, and then he is justified by grace. He may be righteous in himself, and this is the righteousness of works; or he may be righteous in another, and this is the righteousness of faith. Hence, to deny imputed righteousness is either to deny the possibility of justification at all, or to make it consist in the deeds of the law—both hypotheses involving a rejection of the grace of the gospel. There are plainly but three possible suppositions in the case: either, there is no righteousness in which a sinner is accepted, and justification is simply pardon; or, it must be the righteousness of God, without the law; or, the righteousness of personal obedience; it must either be none, inherent, or imputed.”⁴ Having given the Calvinistic statement of the doctrine, Girardeau goes on, “to compare with it the Evangelical Arminian, under three corresponding heads. The Constituent Elements of justification are, *first*, the pardon, or non-imputation, of guilt; *secondly*, the acceptance of the sinner’s person as righteous, involving his investiture with a right and title to eternal life. Taken generally, justification may be said to consist of three things: first, the imputation of Christ’s righteousness; secondly, the non-imputation of guilt, or pardon; thirdly, the acceptance of the sinner’s person as righteous and the bestowal upon him of a right and title to eternal life. But taken strictly, justification is pardon and the eternal acceptance of the sinner’s person. The ground and the constituent elements are not to be confounded. It is not: justification is the non-imputation of guilt and the imputation of righteousness, which would seem to be the natural antithesis; but first comes the imputed righteousness of Christ as the round, and then the elements or parts, – namely, pardon, and acceptance with a title to indefectible life. Third, the condition on man’s part, or the Instrument, of justification is Faith, and faith alone. In receiving Christ, as a justifying Saviour, it receives his as infused and constituting a subjective character, but his as a formal investiture of his person. God, therefore, is just in justifying him since, although consciously and subjectively a sinner, he possesses in Christ a perfect righteousness, such as the law demands in order to justification, and such as satisfies its claims. When

the sinner by faith accepts Christ with this righteousness, he has an adequate ground of justification: consciously has it, so that he can plead it before God.”

¹ J.I. Packer, “Arminianism” in *Through Christ’s Word: A Festschrift for Dr. Philip E. Hughes*, eds. W. Robert Godfrey and Jesse L. Boyd III (P & R, 1985), p. 131.

² This entire section is adopted from John Girardeau *Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism* (rpt. Sprinkle Publication, 1984), pp. 416-422.

³ As cited by Girardeau, p. 420.

⁴ As cited by Girardeau, p. 421.