

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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JUSTIFICATION AND PEACE WITH GOD

The Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation reacted negatively to the Reformers' account of justification and came out with an alternative view. At the Council of Trent (1545-63), Rome continued to use the word *justification* but filled it with a completely different meaning. For Trent justification was a process rather than an act of God, a process initiated by the sacrament of baptism where the righteousness of God was thought to be infused; a process nurtured by the religious works of the faithful and sustained by the sacramental system of the church; a process needing to include a time of purification in purgatory, before perhaps being enacted on judgment day. Rome reframed justification in terms of a combination of God's initiative and the efforts of human beings. Grace and works joined together, resulting in a continuing journey of justification, ultimately dependent on human works and sacraments. This confused and confusing teaching has been misleading people ever since. The most recent Roman Catholic statement on justification is the 1999 *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* signed between Rome and the World Lutheran Federation. The word *justification* lies at the centre of the document, but it has a different meaning from the biblical one. It presents a non-tragic view of sin; the necessity of the sacramental system of the church; and an emphasis on the universalist scope of justification. The blurred distinction between justification and the response to it are all factors that make the meaning of the word different from the biblical meaning. *JDDJ* gives voice to the present-day common understanding of justification shared by both the Roman Catholic Church and the liberal churches. What is missing both at Trent and in *JDDJ* is the declarative, forensic act of justification, the exclusive grounding in divine grace, the full assurance of being justified because of what God the Father has declared, God the Son has achieved and God the Spirit has worked out.¹

I. **THE FACT OF OUR JUSTIFICATION.**

- A. **What we have** (Rom. 5:1-2). In the opening of the fifth chapter, the apostle writes, "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." It is possible that he is implicitly answering a question that might have arisen from the conclusion of the preceding chapter. It would have been a natural thing for a doubter, or questioner, to ask in objecting to the faith way of salvation, "Is this method safe? Will it enable us to hold out to the end? After all faith is a very tenuous thing. Can it stand up when the trials of life come to us?" In setting forth what we have, Paul mentions peace, which was obtained in the past; access, which is our present possession; and hope, which stretches out into the future (cf. Col. 3:4). The expression "peace with God" in Romans 5 is not to be confused with "the peace of God" (Phil. 4:6-7). "The idea here, writes Boice, "is not that we are upset and therefore need to become trusting and more tranquil, but rather that we have been at war with God and He with us, because of our sin, and that peace has nevertheless been provided for us by God – if we have been justified through faith in Jesus Christ."²

- B. ***What we should do*** (Rom. 5:1, 3). The apostle has said that we should go on enjoying the peace we have, and he adds in verse 3 that we should also glory in tribulations. That seems a rather strange thing to say, does it not? It fairly cries out for explanation, and that is what Paul gives in the following verses.
- C. ***Why we should do it*** (Rom. 5:3-5). The word “knowing” introduces the ground upon which we should boast in our tribulations. Knowledge is the ground of faith in Paul’s mind, and in this case it is the knowledge of a spiritual process. Tribulation introduces a pattern of growth in the believer’s life that concludes with the possession of what we had before it began and an approved character. Tribulations really strengthen us, contrary to what one might think. The first thing Paul says is that tribulations work patience. Trials come from Him (cf. 8:35-39), and they give occasion for the exhibition of His power and grace (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9). The apostle says that patience does its work, too. It produces experience, a word that means something like *an approved character*. Cf. Phil. 2:22; 2 Cor. 2:9, 8:2, 9:13, 13:3. And finally, experience works hope. As Cranfield says, “To have one’s faith proved by God in the fires of tribulation and sustained by Him so as to stand the test is to have one’s hope in Him and in the fulfillment of His promises, one’s hope of His glory (v. 2), strengthened and confirmed.”³ The final step in the process is expressed in verse 5, “And hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us.” We have what we began with when the tribulations came, that is, hope, plus the approved character given through the trials. And this hope does not disappoint us by proving to be a false and illusory thing. The reason is given in the words that follow. The love of God for us is the pledge that the hope it promises is valid through the indwelling Spirit (cf. 8:16). The verb “shed abroad” expresses the unstinting lavishness of the giving of the Third Person of the Trinity. The lavish nature of the giving will be spelled out in verses 6 through 8.

II. ***THE CERTAINTY OF OUR JUSTIFICATION.***

- A. ***What we were*** (Rom. 5:6, 8, 10). The following three verses, verses 6 through 8, describe the nature of the divine love referred to in verse 5. And, if one were to ask, “Paul, how do we know His love?” the answer would come, “by His death.” That is the theme that the apostle expounds in these verses. Four descriptions of the sinner are given in these verses. In verse 6 he is said to be, “without strength” and “ungodly.” In verse 8 he is referred to by the word “sinners.” While in verse 10 he is described by the term “enemies.” To sum up what Paul says about the terms, we could say, the helpless He died for, the ungodly He justified, the sinner He saved, and the enemy He reconciled to Himself.
- B. ***What He did*** (Rom. 5:8). What He did is expressed in the 8th verse, one of the most touching and beautiful that the apostle ever wrote, “But God commendeth His love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” The apostle’s use of the present tense in “commendeth” should be noted. While the act of dying on the cross is an event of the past, the fact that it did occur remains as a present proof and encouragement of the love of God for His saints. That the apostle has believers in mind is clear from the use of the first person plural pronoun, “us.” Paul makes much of the fact that He died for us when we were yet “sinners.”

III. ***THE ENJOYMENT OF OUR JUSTIFICATION.***

- A. ***It guarantees our future salvation*** (Rom. 5:9-10). Cranfield comments, “Having described in vv. 6-8 the nature of God’s love for us, to the reality of which (brought home to our hearts by the Holy Spirit) he had appealed in v. 5 as proof that our hope will not disappoint us, he now returns to the subject of our hope’s not disappointing and affirms the certainty of our hope’s fulfillment, of our final salvation, in two parallel statements (vv. 9 and 10), both in the form of the *argumentum a minori ad maius* (called by the Rabbis *kal wahomer*, i.e., *light and heavy*.)”⁴ It is a marvelous *a fortiori*, and it contains one of the most convincing arguments for the security of the believer, and for the definiteness of the atonement also. It is a brilliant climax to the section as

Paul reasons from the death of Christ to the certainty of final salvation. The “then” introduces the inference from the preceding statement concerning His death. The key verse is the 10th verse, which contains the second of the *argumenta a minori ad maius*. This type of argument is one that contains a conclusion that follows with even greater logical necessity than another already accepted in the argument. In this case the argument already accepted is the reconciliation of enemies to God by the death of His Son, Jesus Christ. If that is accepted, then with even greater logical necessity it follows that the former enemies will be saved by the sharing of His life. In the verse there is a triple antithesis, with an advance in the last phrase, rendered by the KJV, “by His life.” The first antithesis is that of “enemies” and “reconciled.” The second is that of “were reconciled” and “shall be saved.” The third is that of “through the death of His Son” and “by His life.” The advance in the last clause is seen with one note that the preposition translated by “by” in the KJV is the preposition *en*, which means *in*. One would have expected another “by,” or another *dia* in the original, for the phrase rendered “by the death of His Son” contains a *dia*. The apostle advances from **through His life** to **in His life**, because he wants to stress the union that now obtains by virtue of the representative death of the Son. What, then, is the resulting sense of the apostle’s argument? Simply stated, it is this: If He has done the most for us, giving us a crucified Savior for our reconciliation when we were enemies, He surely will give us the least, save us through to the end, now that we have become friends, reconciled to Him. Or, surely if He has done the best for us, He will do the rest. As Sanday and Headlam put it, “If the first intervention cost the death of His Son, the second costs nothing, but follows naturally from the share which we have in His life.”⁵ They in their comment refer to the Pauline use of *en* in the last phrase of the verse when they speak of “from the share, which we have in His life.”⁶ The reference of the *en* may be to 8:34 and the intercession of the Son for us now. It is surely not a reference to deliverance from the dominion of sin, as some Higher Life Bible teachers have thought.⁷ The salvation is defined by the statement of verse 9, “saved from wrath.” Paul is thinking of the deliverance of the believer from the wrath and condemnation of sin, not from its dominion in the believer’s life, except insofar as the latter follows from the former. The argument, thus, is the *ne plus ultra* of the doctrine of the security of the believer. If, when we were enemies, He reconciled us to Himself by giving His Son as a penal, substitutionary sacrifice for sin, He will surely do that which is less now that we are friends, reconciled, deliver us from the wrath to come, and especially since we now share in the life of our Representative through the union consummated with Him. It is the kind of argument that cannot be refuted. The logic is inescapable. Cf. Jud. 13:23. From the verse, therefore, we derive the greatest assurance of the certainty of the salvation that is given by grace through faith.

- B. ***It guarantees our future exultation*** (Rom. 5:11). Verse 11 is the climax of the section. There are several things to note. In the first place, the rendering of the KJV of the Greek word *katallagen*, “atonement,” is surely wrong. The word means *reconciliation*. The word *atonement* is an Old Testament word, referring to the covering of sin. It is not found at all in the New Testament, for sin is there not simply covered by the death of Christ, but paid for and removed. In the second place, there exists a question over the rendering of the participle *kauchomenoi*, rendered in the KJV by “we joy.” It may be taken in this way, construed as an indicative, and many commentators take it that way. It may also be taken as an imperative, being translated then, “And not only so, but joy in God,” etc. That is less likely, since the construction is not frequent in the New Testament. In the third place, the most obvious way to take the participle is to take it as modifying the subject of the last finite verb. In this case it would modify the subject of the last finite verb. In this case it would modify the subject of the verb rendered “we shall be saved.” That is the most common force of a participle, and the sense is excellent here. The antithetical “now,” opposed to the future sense of the verb, “we shall be saved,” supports the taking of the participle as modifying the subject, “we.” We would then render the last verse, “And not only so, but we shall be saved” boasting in our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have simply this: We shall be not only saved in our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the

reconciliation.” The meaning of Paul, then, would be simply this: We shall be not only saved by sharing in His life, but we shall be saved, or carried right on through to heaven, boasting in our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, a triumphant, abundant entrance into glory is assured the saints for whom He has died. If, however, the traditional Reformational understanding of *sola fide* is jettisoned, then all that is stated here is mute.

CONCLUSION: Roman Catholicism sees justification as a gradual and progressive process through which the righteousness of Christ is increasingly infused into a person and is therefore not seen as a declarative act of God through which the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the sinner. Justification is not a theological relic of a distant past. It is indeed key for grasping the good news of Christ. Roman Catholicism uses the same word but has a completely different understanding and explanation of the theology of that word, massively affecting its practice.⁸

ENDNOTES

¹ Leonardo De Chirico, *Same Words, Different Worlds* (IVP, 2021), p. 46.

² J. M. Boice, *Romans: An Expositional Commentary II* (Baker, 1992), p. 507.

³ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to The Romans I* (T&T Clark, 1975), p. 261.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 265.

⁵ W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to The Romans I* (T&T Clark, 1902), p. 119.

⁶ Cf. B. B. Warfield’s critical analysis of the Higher Life teachings in his two volume “Perfectionism” *Works VII and VIII* (rpt. Baker, 1982).

⁷ The exegetical observations are those of my late prof of Theology, Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. and are from his unpublished lectures on Romans. I served as Dr. Johnson’s teaching assistant at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1984-85.

⁸ Leonardo De Chirico, *op. cit.*, p. 49.