

LIVING FAITH (2)
Habakkuk 2:4b; Romans 1:17
June 1, 2008 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church

A few weeks ago we began looking at the Habakkuk 2:4, “But the righteous will live by his faith,” through the lens of the New Testament. Three times we find the verse quoted in the New Testament, twice by Paul in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11, and once by the author of Hebrews in Hebrews 10:38 that Steve dealt with last week in Sunday School. Tonight we look at the second part of the Romans 1:17 text and Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith alone.

By way of introduction, I want to read James Montgomery Boice’s fine historical reminder of the importance of this verse in the life of Martin Luther. From this we can see how this verse came to be known as “Martin Luther’s text.”

It is not possible to go on with a discussion of this verse without acknowledging the impact it has had on history, particularly the way it gripped the heart and mind of Martin Luther and thus led in a very direct and obvious way to the Protestant Reformation.

In Luther’s day the glory of the gospel—that a man is justified before God on the basis of what God has done and that he receives this by faith and not by works—had been clouded over by the traditions of medieval Catholicism, much as the truth of the gospel has been covered over by traditions in many Protestant and Catholic churches today. Luther, who grew up under the medieval system, felt the burden of his sin and did not know how to free himself of it. He was not sick or crazy, as some have claimed. He simply recognized God’s just standards expressed in his law and knew that he fell short of them. As Luther read the Decalogue and other ethical portions of the Bible, he knew that he was condemned by those standards and trembled because of it.

Determined to seek his salvation, Luther entered the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt and in that monastery had opportunity to study the Bible carefully. He was encouraged in this by a wonderful spiritual father, his superior, who directed him to important portions of the Word of God. As Luther studied the Word he came upon this text—“The righteous will live by his faith”—and it began to take root in his mind. At this point, Luther did not understand the verse, as he later would come to understand it, but he recognized its importance. He recognized that somewhere in these words was a revelation of a different way of pleasing God than by fastings, self-immolations, prayers, charity, and good works.

There was a second period in his life when this text also spoke to him. He had begun a pilgrimage to Rome, and on that journey he had crossed the Alps and had fallen sick at Bologna. He was deathly ill. During his sickness he was tenderly cared for by the monks. But Luther was overcome with the utmost darkness and dejection, reflecting on how horrible it was to die thus—under the burning sky and in a foreign land. His physical condition reflected the inner turmoil of his soul and was an image of what he imagined it would be like to stand before the burning wrath of God. While he lay thus, the words that had earlier pressed themselves upon his thinking returned to his mind, and he found himself repeating in growing belief: “The righteous will live by his faith. The righteous will live by his faith.”

When Luther recovered from his illness he went to Rome. In that capital, in the church of St. John’s Lateran, there is a staircase that is said to be from Pilate’s judgment

hall. The existing stairs are in four parts: the special inner two, said to have been transported there miraculously from Jerusalem, and the ordinary outer two. The inner steps are not walked on. Here pilgrims mount painfully on their knees, a step at a time, saying prayers as they go. At different points on these stairs there are stains that have been covered with pieces of glass. They are said to have been caused by the blood of Christ, spilled when he was taken in and out of Pilate's hall. As the pilgrims go up the stairs they stop at these places and kiss the glass, praying constantly. Luther came to the Lateran church to perform this rite. The pope had promised an indulgence to all who would do it. What happened to him there is told by his son Dr. Paul Luther in a manuscript preserved in the library of Rudolstadt: "As he repeated his prayers on the Lateran staircase, the words of the prophet Habakkuk came suddenly to his mind: 'The just shall live by his faith.' Thereupon he ceased his prayers, returned to Wittenberg, and took this as the chief foundation of all his doctrine." Luther's turnabout on those stairs marked the beginning of the Reformation that was soon to sweep Europe.

Luther himself said of this text, "Before those words broke upon my mind I hated God and was angry with him because, not content with frightening us sinners by the law and by the miseries of life, he still further increased our torture by the gospel. But when, by the Spirit of God, I understood those words—'The just shall live by faith! The just shall live by faith!'—then I felt born again like a new man; I entered through the open doors into the very Paradise of God."¹

From this sketch of Luther's life, we see the importance of these words to the Christian faith. What did Luther learn about these words that so changed his life. What led him to say, "On the doctrine of justification by faith alone, the church stands or falls"?

Last time we began to look at this doctrine from Paul's excursus in Romans. There we saw that this verse, "The righteous will live by faith," is the theme upon which the entire book of Romans expands. We noted three things concerning the doctrine of justification:

- (1) The *declarer* of justification—the holy, righteous God. **Romans 8:33**, "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? *God is the one who justifies.*"
- (2) The *need* for justification—All men are sinners. Paul wrote in **Romans 3:23**, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." What is the penalty of this sin in all men? **Romans 6:23**, "For the wages of sin is death."
- (3) The *grounds* for justification— Jesus Christ and His meritorious work as our substitute. Christ accomplished justification in His perfect obedience to the entire Law for us on this earth and by His death for us on the Cross. **Romans 5:19** – For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

Tonight, we look at three more aspects of the doctrine of justification.

4. The *Means* of Justification

Given the truth that in his sin man remains separated from God and the only ground by which he might be reconciled to God is through Christ alone is a wonderful thing. The fact that God has provided a way for evil men to be reconciled to Him should astound us. However, if this

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, vol. 2, "Micah-Malachi", 408-409.

were the end of the story, we are still doomed. How can man get to God through Christ? God not only provided the end but the means as well.

a. Not by works

The Apostle Paul was clear in numerous places that man cannot be justified by his own works

Romans 3:20 – by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin.

The Law condemns us. As we have seen, if our righteousness depended on our keeping God's holy Law perfectly, we are hopeless. If God's requirement for justice depended on our works, then we all would be condemned.

Galatians 3:21-22 – For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. ²² But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Romans 3:21 – But now *apart* from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested.

Ephesians 2:8-9 – For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

If one could be justified by the law, then Christ's death was not necessary.

Galatians 2:21 – if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.

Galatians 3:11 – Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, “THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.”

So the Scriptures are clear, man cannot be justified by his own works but by *GRACE!*

Romans 3:24-25: being justified as a gift *by His grace* through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith.

Works/grace Earned/gift

b. By faith

Not all sinners are justified. Faith is the condition of justification. We do not look to our works, our obedience, for justification. We look to Christ's work and His perfect obedience by faith. We trust in His merits, His perfect obedience, His faith... *This was the watershed moment in Luther's understanding of justification.*

Romans 4:2-5 – ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? “ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.” ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. ⁵ But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.

Romans 5:1 – Therefore, *having been justified by faith*, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 10:4 – For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness *to everyone who believes*.

What is justifying faith? Faith is not simply believing in the historical person of Jesus. Faith does not mean simply believing in God, for even the demons believe. Faith is not just some intellectual adherence to some set of propositions. Faith is not faith in a decision or faith in a prayer or faith in a profession of faith. Faith is trusting and embracing Christ alone and His meritorious work on your behalf. Leon Morris defines faith as “the response of the whole man to the divine act on Calvary, as he trustfully commits himself to his Creator, and rests in Him for time and eternity.”² [*Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 287]

And particularly as it relates to justifying faith, John Murray stated, “The specific quality of faith is that it receives and rests upon another, in this case Christ and his righteousness.”³ [*Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 130]

Charles Haddon Spurgeon came under fire in his ministry from all fronts in his correct teaching of what he called “duty faith.” Spurgeon taught that man is justified by God’s grace alone, but he understood that man still had the duty to exercise faith in Christ alone. The hyper-Calvinists accused Spurgeon of being an Arminian, preaching works salvation. The Arminians accused him of being a hyper-Calvinist because of his stress on the grace of God apart from works. But Spurgeon had it right. God has provided the means by which one might be reconciled to Him, and that is through saving faith in the finished work of Christ alone. Man is commanded to receive Christ. This becomes clearer when we understand...

5. The *Justice of Justification*

How is it that God can be both just (absolutely right in His holy judgment) and justifier (the One who declares a sinner right with Him)? Is there divine justice in justification? The answer is a glorious YES! The moment one trusts Christ’s meritorious work on his behalf as his substitute, a divine transaction takes place. This is known as *imputation*. (Accounting term)

a. *Imputation of our sin onto Christ (expiation)*

2 Corinthians 5:21 – He made Him who knew no sin *to be sin on our behalf*, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

John 1:29 – Behold, the *Lamb of God* who takes away the sin of the world!

b. *Imputation of Christ’s righteousness onto us (propitiation)*

Alien righteousness of Christ – this is the something outside of us that justifies!

² Leon Morris, *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 287.

³ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 130.

Romans 5:8-9 – ⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, *we shall be saved from the wrath of God* through Him.

1 John 2:2 – He Himself is the propitiation for our sins.

6. The *Benefits* of Justification

- a. Forgiveness of sin – (Romans 8:1) – Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- b. Assurance (Romans 5:1) – Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. *Wrath of God appeased.*
- c. Union with Christ (Romans 8:32-39) – ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? ³³ Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; ³⁴ who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." ³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- d. Adoption (legal declaration, courtroom scene, Rom. 8:15, “Abba, Father”)
- e. Sanctification – We are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone.
- f. Glorification (Romans 8:29-30) – ²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; ³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.