

THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH

There are many who find satisfaction in identifying themselves with false doctrines, that there may be not disturbance or difference between themselves and the world; but the children of God must bear testimony to the truth, not only by pen and voice but by spirit and character.

So, What Is the Problem?

Could it be that many do not understand righteousness by faith? Are we caught hanging by a thread on either side of the rope and cannot understand why we are having a problem of getting a grip, or solid hold, on our faith? On one side we have those who push law, and on the other those advocating grace. Those at either extreme don't realize that we can't have one without the other, and that they both mean absolutely nothing without Jesus. He is the focal point of the law and the grace that each and every human being needs.

One of the most powerful quotes that I have been blessed to read concerning righteousness by faith is:

Paul had ever exalted the divine law. He had shown that in the law there is no power to save men from the penalty of disobedience. Wrongdoers must repent of their sins and humble themselves before God, Whose just wrath they have incurred by breaking His law, and they must also exercise faith in the blood of Christ as their only means of pardon. The Son of God had died as their sacrifice and had ascended to Heaven to stand before the Father as their Advocate. By repentance and faith they might be freed from the condemnation of sin and through the grace of Christ be enabled henceforth to render obedience to the law of God.

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. (Proverbs 3:13)

Next, let us review the three steps to righteousness by faith.

1. **We must repent.**

“Despise thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (Romans 2:4).

“Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:14, 15).

- Repentance: if it is genuine, it will enable the individual to find the peace of forgiveness through Christ our Righteousness. He can find justification through the Justifier.
- Why is this so important? “God requires the entire surrender of the heart, before justification can take place; and in order for man to retain justification, there must be continual obedience, through active, living faith that works by love and purifies the soul.” Repentance is the understanding that God is right and we are wrong, and it will lead us to feel our need of Him for our purification.

2. **We must exercise *faith* in the blood of Christ as our only means of pardon.**

“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith” (Romans 12:3).

“In order for man to be justified by faith, faith must reach a point where it will control the affections and impulses of the heart; and it is by obedience that faith itself is made perfect.”

“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

1. Do I really believe that the blood of Jesus Christ can atone for my sins?
2. Do I really believe that the blood of Jesus Christ has covered my sins?

3. **Grace will enable us to render obedience to the law of God.**

Without the grace of Christ, the sinner is in a hopeless condition; nothing can be done for him; but through divine grace, supernatural power is imparted to the man and works in mind and heart and character.

1. “Moreover the law entered, that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Romans 5:20).
2. “The Lord requires at this time just what He required of Adam and Eve— perfect obedience to the law of God.” This is only possible as God imparts His righteousness to us.
3. “Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, *happy* is he” (Proverbs 29:18, emphasis supplied).

Understanding how these three elements work in our lives is central to our happiness.

The law demands righteousness, and this the sinner owes to the law; but he is incapable of rendering it. The only way in which he can attain to righteousness is through faith. By faith he can bring to God the merits of Christ, and the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner's account. Praise God!

Great peace have they that love Thy law: and nothing shall offend them. (Psalm 119:165)

After people repent and by faith learn to trust that Christ's atonement for us is sufficient, God will impart His grace to give them the power to obey His law. We cannot keep God's law with joy unless we have followed the first three steps previously mentioned. Could this be the reason why so many people struggle with the joy of salvation, struggle to have peace with God and His church and His people?

What About Luther?

Martin Luther struggled with this joy-in-salvation issue. Until he discovered the text: “The just shall live by faith,” this great Reformer, who helped so many others to strengthen their hold on faith, had a perpetual battle with his own faith. He had no peace. No matter what he did, there was no rest for his soul. “The content of the depressions was always the same, the loss of faith that God is good and that He is good *to me.*”

“His concern was all the more intense because he was a physician of souls; and if the

medicine which he had prescribed for himself and for them was actually poison, how frightful was his responsibility. The problem for him was not to know where his depressions came from, but to know how to overcome them.” He did not realize that he must understand both where his depressions came from and how to overcome them.

Like many today, “Luther felt that his depressions were necessary. At the same time they were dreadful and by all means and in every way to be avoided and overcome.” This is another problem for those who do not have a clear understanding of righteousness by faith.

1. Many today do not realize that we need to understand that Jesus Christ is the only means by which we can overcome . . .
2. We also need to know where the depression comes from. This knowledge usually comes when we understand that we can add nothing to what He has done already. It is by faith in Him, not ourselves.
3. Some have even come to the conclusion that unless they suffer or go around depressed about something, they have not afflicted the soul enough. See what happened to Martin Luther:

One day, among others, wishing to obtain an indulgence promised by the pope to all who should ascend on their knees what is called Pilate’s Staircase, the poor Saxon monk was humbly creeping up those steps, which he was told had been miraculously transported from Jerusalem to Rome. But while he was performing this meritorious act, he thought he heard a voice of thunder crying from the bottom of his heart, as at Wittenberg and Bologna, “The just shall live by faith.”¹¹

There are many who make promises just like the popes of old and of now. If accepted, such promises will lead precious souls down the path of frustration and despair.

From the pulpits of today the words are uttered: “Believe, only believe. Have faith in Christ; you have nothing to do with the old law, only trust in Christ.” How different is this from the words of the apostle who declares that faith without works is dead. He says, “But be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1: 22). We must have that faith that works by love and purifies the soul. Many seek to substitute a superficial faith for uprightness of life and think through this to obtain salvation.

Through all the battles Luther faced—the self-inflicted abuse whether beating himself, climbing Pilate’s Staircase on his knees, or the withholding of all worldly comforts, no sacrifice could add anything to the price Christ paid. That is why Luther could not find peace while trying to accumulate favor with God. It was faith in what Christ had done that finally gave Luther the peace he so much craved.

There are still many churches today that will give their people tools or methods by which they are supposed to find pardon. Yet no peace comes, nor can it come, with anything other than simple faith in Christ.

This righteousness is heavenly and passive: which we have not of ourselves, but receive it from Heaven: which we work not, but apprehend it by faith. . .

In that righteousness and life [of Christ] I have no sin, no sting of conscience, no care of death. . . . I have another righteousness and life above this life, which is Christ the Son of God, Who knoweth no sin nor death, but is righteousness and life eternal.

Oh, how I believe many of us need to fall once again on that same Rock and be broken. Pride, conflict, strife, power struggles, and discord in the church have not only led to hatred amongst members but also have taken many innocent casualties in the process.

A matter that all need to understand is that we can experience real joy in our salvation:

1. "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; Who for the *joy* that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2; emphasis supplied).
2. "Likewise, I say unto you, there is *joy* in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:10; emphasis supplied).
3. "Repentance is associated with faith and is urged in the Gospel as essential to salvation. . . . This repentance has in it nothing of the nature of merit, but it prepares the heart for the acceptance of Christ as the only Saviour, the only hope of the lost sinner."
4. "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear *joy* and gladness; that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the *joy* of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free Spirit" (Psalm 51:7–12; emphasis supplied).

One of the key indicators, then, that we have salvation is joy, or peace.

In verse 13, we see the results of being forgiven and having faith that His blood is sufficient. The Bible says, "Then." "*Then* will I teach transgressors Thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto Thee" (emphasis supplied).

Another clear indicator is that after we have repented and accepted Christ's atonement for our sins by faith, we will, according to Psalm 51:13, teach others of that salvation. But we must remember that we can only be truly happy when we are at one with our God and that loyalty is the fruit of that love. Remember what we read from *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 393: "By repentance and faith they [mankind] might be freed from the condemnation [count it all joy to us!] of sin and through the grace of Christ be enabled henceforth to render obedience to the law of God."

Conclusion

From all that we have considered thus far, it is clear that we struggle when we do not understand righteousness by faith. We struggle with doubt, frustrated with all the efforts of keeping the law and yet still coming short of where we know we should be. Salvation under such conditions is not a joy, and if we are not careful, the next logical place we find ourselves is in doubting our message—doubting the very church that God has set up to shine forth amongst all the false churches in the world.

Under this dark cloud of doubt, we may even come to the place where we start questioning the Spirit of Prophecy, then the Bible: Are they really inspired? Next might come a move to Sunday worship, then perhaps even blaming God Himself for our backsliding.

Beloved, it all leads to Sunday. If we would fall in love with Christ we will see and find love in keeping His fourth commandment. Then by faith—righteousness by faith—we may

believe that His blood does cover our sins, that He died specifically for each of us. Here is where we really find the “joy in thy salvation” of Psalm 51:12.

Why People Must Understand Righteousness by Faith

The thought that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, not because of any merit on our part, but as a free gift from God, is a precious thought. The enemy of God and man is not willing that this truth should be clearly presented; for he knows that if the people receive it fully, his power will be broken.