

“Justified By Faith”

October 28, 2007

Romans 5:1-11

(Note: substantial portions of this sermon are direct quotations from the Scots Confession, and the notations refer to the section number in the *Book of Confessions*.)

Read Romans 5:1-11

We will be focusing our attention on verses 1 and 2 this morning. Verses 1 and 2 are foundational for our understanding of who we are and how God is worthy of all our praise for providing for our election and salvation. We are not dependent upon any man or any other action we can take for our justification; our justification is dependent solely on Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul was writing to a community of new believers in Rome. There were Gentiles. There were Jews. In Paul’s experience – even from his own experience – the Jews held onto the Law as their claim to righteousness in God’s eye. Paul shatters that confidence by showing how their claim to righteousness achieved just the opposite: it demonstrated their utter failure at being righteous.

These same errors led to the calls for reform in the Roman Catholic Church in 1517. Martin Luther’s 95 theses posted on the Wittenburg Door were intended to draw the Roman Catholic Church back away from its fatally erroneous position of equating the authority of Church tradition with Scripture; tradition that sought to impose requirements in addition to the blood of Christ on believers for righteousness. Oh, how subtle are the errors of men that cause others to be denied the peace that comes from the assurance of grace given through Christ for the glory of God!

These few words in verses 1 and 2 make clear the joyous consequence of God’s intervention into history; make clear that God has taken the initiative to provide for our redemption and our salvation; make clear that God has already done it and we only need receive it with joy. How wonderful! How marvelous! Is my Savior’s love for me!

Hear again these words of comfort, “Therefore, *since we are justified...*”

Original Sin

Justification means being made right, being brought back into line, having error and fault removed. From what did you and I need to be justified?

We confess and acknowledge that our God has created man, i.e., our first father, Adam, after his own image and likeness, to whom he gave wisdom, lordship, justice, free will, and self-consciousness, so that in the whole nature of man no imperfection could be found. From this dignity and perfection man and woman both fell; the woman being deceived by the serpent and man obeying the voice of the woman, both conspiring against the sovereign majesty of God, who in clear words had previously threatened death if they presumed to eat of the forbidden tree. (BoC, 3.02)

By this transgression, generally known as original sin, the image of God was utterly defaced in

man, and he and his children became by nature hostile to God, slaves to Satan, and servants to sin. And thus everlasting death has had, and shall have, power and dominion over all who have not been, are not, or shall not be reborn from above. This rebirth is wrought by the power of the Holy Ghost creating in the hearts of God's chosen ones an assured faith in the promise of God revealed to us in his Word; by this faith we grasp Christ Jesus with the graces and blessings promised in him. (BoC, 3.03).

Justification

How did God deal with our transgression? He dealt in his own time and in his own way.

When the fullness of time came God sent his Son, his eternal wisdom, the substance of his own glory, into this world, who took the nature of humanity from the substance of a woman, a virgin, by means of the Holy Ghost. And so was born the "just seed of David," the "Angel of the great counsel of God," the very Messiah promised, whom we confess and acknowledge to be Emmanuel, true God and true man, two perfect natures united and joined in one person. So by our Confession we condemn the damnable and pestilent heresies of Arius, Marcion, Eutyches, Nestorius, and such others as did either deny the eternity of his Godhead, or the truth of his humanity, or confounded them, or else divided them. (3.06)

We acknowledge and confess that this wonderful union between the Godhead and the humanity in Christ Jesus did arise from the eternal and immutable decree of God from which all our salvation springs and depends. (BoC, 3.07)

That same eternal God and Father, who by grace alone chose us in his Son Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world was laid, appointed him to be our head, our brother, our pastor, and the great bishop of our souls. But since the opposition between the justice of God and our sins was such that no flesh by itself could or might have attained unto God, it behooved the Son of God to descend unto us and take himself a body of our body, flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone, and so become the Mediator between God and man, giving power to as many as believe in him to be the sons of God. (BoC 3.08)

Further, it behooved the Messiah and Redeemer to be true God and true man, because he was able to undergo the punishment of our transgressions and to present himself in the presence of his Father's judgment, as in our stead, to suffer for our transgression and disobedience, and by death to overcome him that was the author of death. But because the Godhead alone could not suffer death, and neither could manhood overcome death, he joined both together in one person, that the weakness of one should suffer and be subject to death—which we had deserved—and the infinite and invincible power of the other, that is, of the Godhead, should triumph, and purchase for us life, liberty, and perpetual victory. (BoC, 3.08)

It was impossible that the sorrows of death should retain in bondage the Author of life, that our Lord Jesus crucified, dead, and buried, who descended into hell, did rise again for our justification, and the destruction of him who was the author of death, and brought life again to us who were subject to death and its bondage. We know that his resurrection was confirmed by the testimony of his enemies, and by the resurrection of the dead, whose sepulchres did open, and they did rise and appear to many within the city of Jerusalem. It was also confirmed by the testimony of his angels, and by the senses and judgment of his apostles and of others, who had conversation, and did eat and drink with him after his resurrection. (BoC, 3.10)

By Faith

God has achieved this resurrection. God has caused the resurrection. God has inspired the testimony and confirmed it. In fulfilling Scripture, Christ has made valid all of his claims and commands. Upon the confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, Jesus has promised to build his church. (Matthew 16) And so it is, that upon that blessed confession of man's soul, he is joined to the gathering of the saints who are adopted as children of the king, co-heirs with Christ of the eternal kingdom.

Hear again the words of our Scripture this morning, "Since we are justified by faith..."

Our faith and its assurance do not proceed from flesh and blood, that is to say, from natural powers within us, but are the inspiration of the Holy Ghost; whom we confess to be God, equal with the Father and with his Son, who sanctifies us, and brings us into all truth by his own working, without whom we should remain forever enemies to God and ignorant of his Son, Christ Jesus. For by nature we are so dead, blind, and perverse, that neither can we feel when we are pricked, see the light when it shines, nor assent to the will of God when it is revealed, unless the Spirit of the Lord Jesus quicken that which is dead, remove the darkness from our minds, and bow our stubborn hearts to the obedience of his blessed will. And so, as we confess that God the Father created us when we were not, as his Son our Lord Jesus redeemed us when we were enemies to him, so also do we confess that the Holy Ghost does sanctify and regenerate us, without respect to any merit proceeding from us, be it before or be it after our regeneration. To put this even more plainly; as we willingly disclaim any honor and glory for our own creation and redemption, so do we willingly also for our regeneration and sanctification; for by ourselves we are not capable of thinking one good thought, but he who has begun the work in us alone continues us in it, to the praise and glory of his undeserved grace. (BoC, 3.12)

Peace with God

What consequence has been wrought by our justification? Scripture tells us, "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God."

The chosen departed are in peace, and rest from their labors; not that they sleep and are lost in oblivion as some fanatics hold, for they are delivered from all fear and torment, and all the temptations to which we and all God's chosen are subject in this life, and because of which we are called the Kirk Militant. On the other hand, the reprobate and unfaithful departed have anguish, torment, and pain which cannot be expressed. Neither the one nor the other is in such sleep that they feel no joy or torment, as is testified by Christ's parable in St. Luke XVI, his words to the thief, and the words of the souls crying under the altar, "O Lord, thou that art righteous and just, how long shalt thou not revenge our blood upon those that dwell in the earth?" (BoC, 3.17)

Access to Grace in Which We Stand

It is the "access to this grace in which we stand" by which we are numbered among those labeled

“Protestants.” That name is given those who reject the authority fraudulently usurped by the Roman Church, which threatens to withhold the grace by adding human actions and offerings to the blood of our blessed Savior. They have come to this conclusion through the councils of men; councils to which much authority has been yielded.

As we believe and confess the Scriptures of God sufficient to instruct and make perfect the man of God, so do we affirm and avow their authority to be from God, and not to depend on men or angels. We affirm, therefore, that those who say the Scriptures have no other authority save that which they have received from the Kirk are blasphemous against God and injurious to the true Kirk, which always hears and obeys the voice of her own Spouse and Pastor, but takes not upon her to be mistress over the same. (BoC, 3.19)

We do not rashly condemn what good men, assembled together in general councils lawfully gathered, have set before us; so we do not receive uncritically whatever has been declared to men under the name of the general councils, for it is plain that, being human, some of them have manifestly erred, and that in matters of great weight and importance. So far then as the council confirms its decrees by the plain Word of God, so far do we reverence and embrace them. But if men, under the name of a council, pretend to forge for us new articles of faith, or to make decisions contrary to the Word of God, then we must utterly deny them as the doctrine of devils, drawing our souls from the voice of the one God to follow the doctrines and teachings of men. The reason why the general councils met was not to make any permanent law which God had not made before, nor yet to form new articles for our belief, nor to give the Word of God authority; much less to make that to be his Word, or even the true interpretation of it, which was not expressed previously by his holy will in his Word; but the reason for councils, at least of those that deserve that name, was partly to refute heresies, and to give public confession of their faith to the generations following, which they did by the authority of God’s written Word, and not by any opinion or prerogative that they could not err by reason of their numbers. This, we judge, was the primary reason for general councils. (BoC, 3.20)

Conclusion

The inspired Word of God, written in the hand of the Apostle Paul, has given us these words of the Almighty God’s gracious love for those who receive the blessed Savior, even Jesus Christ, as their hope for righteousness and salvation. If any are here today who have not received him – Oh, how I pray you will! Do not delay. Pray for the blessing of conviction and regeneration by the Holy Spirit through which you will know the peace and comfort of your eternal salvation in communion with the Father, the Son, and with the Holy Spirit; the one God who reigned before time, who reigns today, and who will reign forever and ever.

For others who know of their gracious Redeemer, take comfort in these words, “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.”

Brothers and sisters in Christ, I submit these words to you for the glory of God alone.

Amen and amen.