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Justification by Faith

Jeff May

The Bible teaches we are justified by faith. It has always been this way. Even in the Old Testament, it was taught, "The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17; Hab. 2:4).

The word "faith" carries with it the idea of faithfulness. It is a picture of a man whose entire life is characterized by faithfulness toward God. Faithfulness will always do what is asked of it. Sometimes it demands nothing except trust. At other times, it demands obedience. Abraham's faith justified him in both instances. God promised him he would have more descendants than the stars of the sky. In that instance, faith demanded nothing more than Abraham's trust. Later Abraham was told to offer Isaac as a sacrifice unto God. Now, faith required obedience. Abraham's faith worked. He obeyed. On both occasions, Abraham was justified by His faith.

This helps to understand the faith that saves you and me. It is the same kind of faith Abraham had (Rom. 4:12). God has promised you and me, dear Christian, that Jesus' death makes possible the remission of our sins. What does this promise require of me? It requires no action on my part; just simple trust. He further tells us that to be saved we must *"repent and be baptized for the remission of our sins"* (Acts 2:38). What does this require of me? Trust alone will not do now. I must obey in faith and then trust Him to do what He has promised. God then asks us to continue to live in faithfulness to Him (Rev. 2:10). Will we sometimes fail? Yes, in weakness we sometimes do. What will faith do in those moments? It will fall upon God. *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us"* (1 Jn. 1:9). It is this man, the faithful and trying man, that God saves. He is not a perfect man but he

is a faithful man. He knows too well his imperfections and His need for God.

In contrast to this man is the man who strives to be saved on the basis of his works. Somehow he has convinced himself of a list of things he can do to earn salvation. I've always thought that would have to be a short list!! He will think of a short list of things he has done that will surely save him. He doesn't lean on the sacrifice of Jesus but rather on his own works. This man is shallow in his thinking. Surely, he ought to be able to see before God's entire and perfect law that he has sinned and is in tremendous need of God. The only thing law can really do for him is to reveal his sin and need for God's grace (Rom. 3:20). This should point him toward the cross of Christ.

Many people read the Bible's emphasis on not being saved by works and conclude that there are no works for us to do in pleasing God. They miss the point. The cross motivates us to obedience and good works for it gives us somewhere to go when we fail. If it were not for the cross, I would not even try to obey. Why should I? Without the cross, just one sin dooms me. But the cross allows me to pick myself up, be forgiven, and get on with the business of being faithful to God. It is *"faith working through love"* (Gal. 5:6). When the faithful servant has striven to do all that God has commanded him, he still humbles himself before His master saying he has only done what was his duty to do (Lk.17:10).

May God help us to be faithful to Him in all things, not trusting in our works but in Him. This is the lifestyle of the justified man.

The Face of Friendship

Gary Henry

"And Jacob said, 'No, please, if I have now found favor in your sight, then receive my present from my hand, inasmuch as I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God, and you were pleased with me'" (Genesis 33:10).

No one ever came to God in true penitence without finding God's welcome to be that of a friend. Having refused to live by the laws of our Creator's kingdom, we know that justice demands our banishment from His presence. As rebels against His love, we are right to fear the consequences of our rebellion. But the wonder of God's character is the grace by which He is willing and able to make us His friends once again.

Jacob had every reason to fear the wrath of Esau, the brother he had so treacherously supplanted before fleeing to Haran. As he returned to Canaan, Jacob prepared many gifts, hoping to placate the anger that he assumed would still be smoldering in his brother's heart. Contrary to all expectation, however, Esau was eager to be reconciled.

"Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept" (Genesis 33:4). Jacob's gifts were not necessary, Esau insisted, but Jacob begged that these be accepted as tokens of his gratitude for the grace, he'd been shown. Jacob knew that he had no rightful claim to the friendship of either God or his brother.

That his brother's face was friendly was as unexpected as the fact that he'd been allowed to survive
in his wrestling with God the night before. Slowly, Jacob was growing in his understanding of God. He was learning that those who will struggle for what is right and deal realistically with their sins can always expect a friendly welcome in the presence of God. And Jacob saw something of this grace in his brother's countenance: "I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God, and you were pleased with me."

When we come to our senses and seek God honestly and penitently, we too will find that He is "gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy" (Psalm 145:8). As traitors, we deserve to be banished from His presence. But such is the love of our Father that He is eager to welcome us back home.

“Take Heed How You Hear”

by Joe R. Price

“Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him” (Luke 8:18).

It is not enough to listen to what Christ says in the Scriptures; we must hear with understanding to do His will. To achieve this, be careful how you listen to the word of Christ. Be cautious not to listen with your mind already made up about what is right and what is wrong. Such a closed mind will not help you find the truth and accept it. Truth is snatched from the closed mind even as it thinks it knows the truth (the wayside soil, Matt. 13:19). Instead, be like the Bereans and have a ready, willing mind to receive the word of Christ, examine the Scriptures to know the truth, and then believe and do it (Acts 17:11-12). You will bear fruit for Christ and grow in His blessings with such a “noble and good heart” (Luke 8:8, 15).