

Present Truth

A magazine dedicated
to the restoration
of New Testament Christianity
in this generation

Sola Gratia Solely by Grace
Solo Christo Solely by Christ
Sola Fide Solely by Faith

DECEMBER 1975
Vol. 4, No. 6

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH AND THE BIBLE

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Present Truth

Present Truth is a magazine dedicated to the restoration of New Testament Christianity and committed to upholding the great Reformation principle of justification by faith.

Editor: Robert D. Brinsmead
Publishing Editor: Norman Jarnes

Publishers: A group of Christian scholars and businessmen without denominational sponsorship who have united to uphold the objective gospel amid the present deluge of religious subjectivism. Multitudes are being caught up in the popular and frantic effort to find satisfaction in some sort of religious experience. *Present Truth* is a voice in this barren wilderness of groveling internalism, a voice which boldly proclaims those great principles upon which the Reformation was founded — namely:

1. *Sola gratia*. God's saving activity outside of us in the person of Jesus Christ is the sole ground of our salvation.

2. *Solo Christo*. Christ's doing and dying on our behalf is the sole basis of our acceptance and continued fellowship with God.

3. *Sola fide*. The Holy Spirit's gift of faith through the hearing of this objective, historical gospel is the sole means whereby Christ's substitutionary life and death are imputed to us for justification unto life eternal. He who is thus justified by faith and filled with God's Spirit will glory only in Christ's cross and make God's saving work in Christ the central affirmation of his Christian witness. Though he will be careful to obey God and please Him in all things, he will continue to repent rather than glory in the feeble attainments of his own Spirit-filled life.

4. *Sola Scriptura*. The Bible and the Bible only is the Christian's objective and infallible rule of faith and practice, alone sufficient that he may "be established in the present truth" (2 Peter 1:12).

Present Truth is not only committed to the task of upholding these founding principles of the Reformation, but it believes that we today must allow these principles to call all that we do and all that we teach into question. These principles call all traditions into question and all statements about the truth into question — even the ones set forth in this magazine. Our vision is a new Reformation that will recover what the Reformers bequeathed us and complete the restoration they so nobly began.

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To Contributors: Since truth is above the preferences and prejudices of any denomination, the editors welcome contributions from anyone and will judge them on their merit alone. If you wish a manuscript returned, please send a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

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Letters—

Address Letters to *Present Truth*,
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Out of Place

Sir / I imagine that the response to your August, 1975, issue, "The Reformation Doctrine of Justification by Faith," has been mixed. As a whole, I appreciate it very much, especially the parts where you reprinted sections from Calvin and *The Book of Concord*. Perhaps it was the presence of these articles that made your lead article, "The Everlasting Gospel and Ben Trying," seem both out of place and disappointing. There's no need to express truth in such terms, and the attempt to make an article have a flavor similar to Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* failed miserably. Please stick to telling the truth in a manner more becoming the greatness of the gospel. Otherwise, I applaud you on another fine issue. Keep up the good work.

William F. Fraatz
Minnesota

Valuable Contribution

Sir / Greetings! Please let me thank you for your kindness in sending *Present Truth* to me. I have discovered it to be a stimulating magazine, and I believe that I have been profited by a great deal of the paper's content. You make a strong and spiritual case for objective truth, and in these days of rampant "experience teachers" that is an excellent thing. Your treatment of the law and of sanctification is most scriptural and, as you say, "fussless."

Of course, you make some sweeping generalizations, and obviously they must be accepted in context. A lot of us Pentecostals would agree with you in your stand against subjective feeling and nothing else. The sort of Pentecostalism that you caricature in *Present Truth* is abhorrent to us also, and we seek to rectify it wherever we can. Please don't just lump us all together as "sensationalists" or simple "second blessers" and as naught else. I am sure that you desire to be objective here as in all else.

You are making, in any event, a valuable contribution to the work of the kingdom of God, and I have passed on your magazine to others. It is a joy to be in touch with you. God will continue

to bless you I am sure, and I will be happy to receive *Present Truth* when it comes out.

It was refreshing to read a magazine that rejoiced in the grand old historicist interpretation of prophecy. Futurism has well-nigh swept the board over here.

Paul R. Newberry
Pentecostal Minister
England

Wildfire of Futurism

Sir / We in the U.S.A. who have been bold enough to oppose the wildfire of futurism are greatly encouraged to learn of your work. We are aware that your main thrust is the great truth of justification by faith, as was also Luther's. And we are in accord with your statement on page 23 of the September, 1974, issue of *Present Truth*: "It is important, indeed most urgent, that we realize the relationship between the light on justification by faith and the identity of antichrist."

We assume that the publishers of *Present Truth* are aware of the great task that confronts you. You must be aware that nearly every Bible college and institute in this country teaches the Roman eschatology. You must also be aware that not one in ten thousand futurists has the slightest inkling that what he so fondly believes in was the invention of and is the accepted eschatology of the Roman Church. Somehow the truth must break in on those who hold this eschatology. Of course, there is the old story that you have to get a mule's attention by bashing him over the head with a fence rail before he will even hear you. Something like that is due now.

McKinley Ash
Florida

Antichrist Today

Sir / I very much appreciate *Present Truth* magazine. I do not agree with your eschatology, but agree wholeheartedly with your upholding of the objective gospel amid the present deluge of religious subjectivism. While in college I gave a report on subjectivism in religion as exemplified by George Fox, John Wesley, Frerich Schleiermacher and Lud-

wig Feurbach. I believe that the teachings of these men are at the root of the emphasis upon subjectivism that we see today. An article on the rise of subjectivism would be very useful.

I reread your special issue on "Justification by Faith and Eschatology" (Sept., 1974). I do believe that the subjective emphasis is the antichrist of our day.

Philip A. Mikkelsen
Baptist Minister
Wisconsin

Incoherent Mixture

Sir / I have finished reading your April, 1975, *Present Truth* ("Antichrist 1975") for the fifth time. It and other issues will be placed in my reference file, which I like to think is limited to the very best of biblical and Christian literature. My own church (Anglican) is rapidly losing its Protestant base to an incoherent mixture of Roman and liberal thought. I therefore greatly enjoyed the J. C. Ryle sermon.

C. Bradley Wilson
Kansas

Conflict of Interests

Sir / There seems to be a conflict of interests within the principles which you set forth in your magazine, *Present Truth*. In the masthead on page two you say that your magazine is dedicated to the restoration of New Testament Christianity and at the same time to upholding the Reformation principle of justification by faith.

Justification by faith is certainly one of the great doctrines of the New Testament, especially within the writings of the apostle Paul. By dwelling only upon this theme within your magazine pages it seems that you are more interested in taking the church back to the time of Martin Luther and the Reformation rather than back to the New Testament and the church found there.

There is a great deal more to the New Testament church than the doctrine of justification by faith. I am not totally convinced that this is the point at which we should stop. If you indeed cling to the principle of *sola Scriptura*, then I'm sure you will agree that the Scriptures

continue much further than justification by faith to include the whole realm of Christian living. I feel that you have left out much from the New Testament teachings in your magazine.

Robert Trosper, Minister
Arkansas

Gospel Centered

Sir / I commend you for setting forth the gospel *before* you take up such subjects as sanctification, eschatology, etc. To know the gospel is to know everything, because the gospel sheds light on everything. I also commend you for standing up for justification by faith when most of the religious world seems to be bored with the whole thing.

Jerry Asleson
Montana

Excellent

Sir / Your special issue on the subject of "Sanctification" (Feb., 1975) was excellent. I have read many articles and books on sanctification, but *Present Truth* has explained it more clearly than any.

Donald G. Mayer, Minister
Pennsylvania

Satisfied a Deep Need

Sir / I have been continually praising the Lord since reading your special presentation on "Sanctification" (*Present Truth*, Feb., 1975). I teach an adult Sunday School Class and have felt helpless in my approach to sanctification both personally and instructively. I sense a note of defensiveness among Christians any time they are exhorted to holiness. The frequent reply is, "I can do nothing; God has to do it in me." Your presentation of sanctification has satisfied a deep need in my life.

Boyd Vest
New York

Angry!

Sir / Did you make me angry! I have always had a warm spot for the charismatic movement, though I never did join it. I did not join because there always seemed to be something that did not quite ring true. Then came along a couple of issues of *Present Truth*. I got angry when I saw this beautiful charismatic movement being exposed. Then, the more I read, the more I realized that the "expose" dealt with the very factor that has been disturbing me but on which I had never been able to lay my finger. How naive I had been! How shallow my insights! Whereas once I was blind, now I see. I shall ever be grateful to you for setting forth so

clearly the meaning and significance of the Reformed faith.

J. D. Wilkie, Minister
Canada

Great Entertainment

Sir / If you are as incorrect in other areas as you are concerning Pentecostal teaching and experience, your total beliefs are a travesty. I wish that you would spend your time and energy winning the lost to our Reformation Christ instead of playing the ignominious role of a barking dog at those who do. In God's declared estimation, "He who winneth souls is wise" . . . not smart. I wonder how former generations survived without you . . . you grand darling and self-appointed gift to the world. And, horror of horrors, what will future generations do without you when you are gone! Finally, to one who is ostensibly intoxicated with his own verbacity, may we Pentecostals dare tell you that our mottoes are now and always have been *sola Scriptura*, *sola gratia*, *sola fide* and *solo Christo*. This is not at all new to us. We fully believe that the Bible was given so we all might have the "subjective" experience of being ready when Jesus Christ returns. Eternity is a long time to regret a lifetime of fostering confusion and division. However, please keep sending your paper. It's great entertainment. Where it is not pathetic, it is humorous.

E. T. Quanabush
Pentecostal Minister
California

The Half Not Told

Sir / Having been raised in the Pentecostal movement, the son of a Pentecostal minister and active as an ordained minister in that movement, I know by close observation the truth of your brochure, *Protestant Revivalism, Pentecostalism and the Drift Back to Rome*. Having left the movement in 1970, convinced of its error, let me assure you that the half has not been told.

David A. Ekstedt, Minister
Montana

Food for Thought

Sir / I received a copy of your special issue, "Justification by Faith and the Charismatic Movement." As I was personally involved in this movement some years ago, having experienced tongues, etc., and the "subjectivism" of it all, I am finding much food for thought in the very first article. I have not been able to get past that one yet. Thank you for your magazine.

Lloyd M. Leadbeater, Pastor
Canada

Significant Issues

Sir / I have very much appreciated receiving *Present Truth* magazine and am convinced that your handling of the issues is in accord with the truth of the Word of God. I would like to order several copies of your pamphlet, "The Baptism of the Holy Spirit," for use in our church. I plan to have a "mini-course" on the Scriptural teachings with regard to the work of the Holy Spirit, and I am sure that much of what I have read and studied in *Present Truth* will be used in that course. Thank you again for your clear, scriptural presentation on these significant issues of our day.

Paul A. Benes, Reformed Pastor
New York

Plans Altered

Sir / Being a fourth year student in a Pentecostal college is a difficult place to be presented with your publication. Regardless of the problems created, I have learned as much by your careful articles as the entire sum of my training. The plans I had have been altered by what I've come to realize, but cheerfully so due to the ministry of the Holy Spirit through your mission. Keep it up!

Randy St. Marie
Minnesota

"Bula Bula" Stories

Sir / I read *Present Truth* along with a Pentecostal magazine, and the differences amazed me. Not just the subject matter, but also the vocabulary. Even as a Christian I get tired of hearing "Praise the Lord!" every third sentence, and I enjoyed reading your magazine because it was straightforward, informative, and didn't come on with the so-called Holy Ghost ultraspiritual language. I've also read a few of the other Christian magazines, and *Present Truth* is a delightful change from the typical "How I Did Such a Good Job for God out in Bula Bula One Summer" stories found even in non-Pentecostal magazines.

Gary Kukis
California

Froth and Bubble

Sir / A friend of mine sent me a copy of *Present Truth*, and I found it most stimulating. With all the "froth and bubble" publications being printed today, it is most refreshing to see something solid and biblical.

G. D. McGuinness, Pastor
South Africa

Appreciates Emphasis

Sir / I appreciate your emphasis on God's holiness and graciousness in the face of man's inability to understand or reach toward God. In this modern Marshall-McLuhan-"cool" age, we need a clear presentation of truth. And we need to recognize the importance of our putting our minds in gear to understand it.

Your imaginative and creative artist deserves a special thank you for his drawings. I find that they add tremendously to the articles.

Hollis Black
Missouri

Excited

Sir / I am so excited about your magazine! It is written in such a way that I can understand it—and it keeps my interest and gives me the desire to learn more. I don't want to miss one of your important publications. I teach confirmation classes in a Lutheran church. As a layman I feel so inadequate and know your materials will be a great help to me.

Mrs. Lloyd Olmstead
Iowa

Clarity

Sir / I congratulate you on the clarity with which your magazine treats theological issues. In fact, I suspect that your main battle is not with heresy, but with unclarity. The churches, organizations and individuals who are proclaiming, for example, salvation on the basis of faith rather than on the ground of the all-sufficient merits of Christ, are doing so because they can't tell the difference, not because they chose one over the other. Thank God for people who can tell the difference!

Michael A. Covington
University Student
Georgia

Needed

Sir / I feel that *Present Truth* is a magazine that is needed in times like these when the great doctrines of the Bible are being questioned or denied.

David Buchanan, Minister
New York

A Blessing

Sir / I have really enjoyed your publications in the last year. They have helped me to see the world religious scene as it is today. It is really a blessing to our growth in Christ when we can more fully understand the doctrine of justification by faith.

Gary L. Vickers
Texas



Editorial

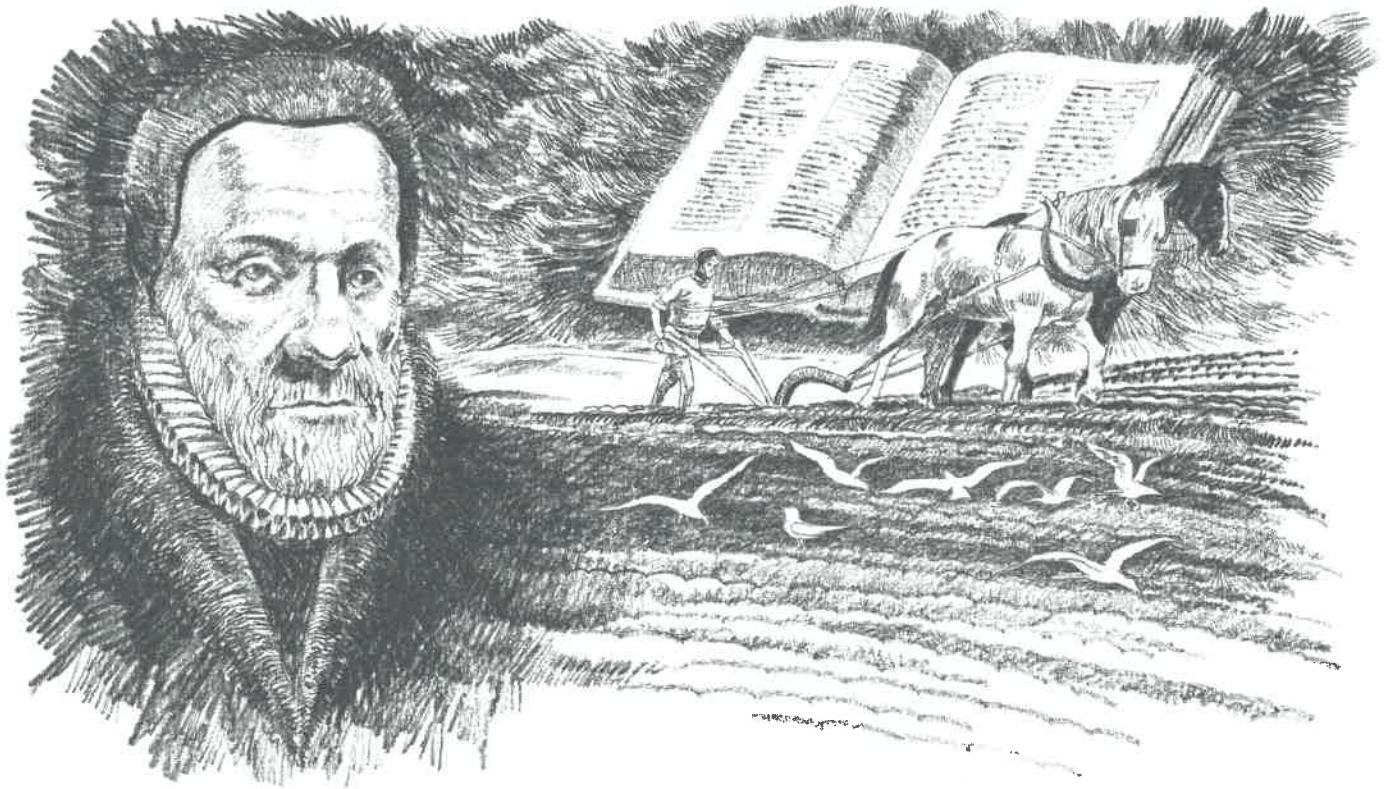
We recently received a letter from a Pentecostal minister who not only reads our magazine, but actually recommends it to his fellow ministers. This is not because he agrees with it all, but because he considers it the most serious challenge to Pentecostalism he has ever faced. He tells his colleagues, "If you can answer *Present Truth's* challenge to Pentecostalism, you can answer anything." A Catholic professor also recommends that his colleagues read our magazine for similar reasons.

We appreciate having this kind of reader—men who are big enough to have their religious heritage called into radical question. Admittedly, we say some negative things. We make no apologies for pulling the noses of our readers who are supposed to be men with a formative influence in the church. Drastic times call for some drastic action. Mature Christians, however, should be able to disagree without being disagreeable. We have said this before, and we must say it again: The person who will throw our magazine away the moment he reads something he cannot agree with is not the kind of reader we are trying to reach.

This editor doesn't necessarily agree with every point in the articles published. My Australian Forum colleague, Geoffrey Paxton, would not agree with everything I write. There is, however, a foundational principle for this publication. The gospel of Christ and His righteousness is central, and this must continue to call all that we do and teach into radical question. By God's grace we are not going to be upset or angry if you call our teachings into question. On the basis of the gospel, bring forth your strong reasons.

"Come . . . , let us reason together. . . ."
R.D.B.





“Exposed Naked to Satan”

Geoffrey J. Paxton

“Exposed naked to Satan”! Hurling “into most certain destruction”! According to William Whitaker, this is the result of taking away the Bible from the people of God. His words are as follows:

Those, therefore, who take the Holy Scriptures away from the people leave them exposed naked to Satan, and hurl them into most certain destruction.

The Reformers fought courageously to give the Bible to the “common people.” They saw this both as the high privilege of all the people of God and an utter necessity. Listen to the words of William Tyndale as he answered one of his ministerial critics:

If God spare my life, ere many years pass I will cause a boy that driveth the plow shall know more of the Scriptures than thou dost.

It may be that Tyndale recalled the words of the humanist, Erasmus, who declared in his *Novum Testamentum* (1522):

The Scripture of Christ should be translated into all tongues that it may be read diligently of the private and secular men and women. . . . I would to God the plowman would sing a text of the Scripture at his ploughbeam, and that the weaver at his loom with this would drive away the tediousness of time. I would the wayfaring man with this pastime would expel the wearisomeness of his journey. And to be short, I would that all the communication of the Christian should be of the Scripture.

Yes, the possession of the Scriptures by all the people of God was the heart’s desire of the fathers of the Reformation, and because by the grace of God that was so, it is one of the great features of true Protestantism.

But what of today? Do we cherish the possession of the Scriptures and their diligent investigation by *all* the people of God? Is this Protestant heritage jealously guarded by evangelical men and women of today?

We believe that, contrary to superficial evidence which would suggest otherwise, there is a taking of the Holy Scriptures from the people, thus hurling them “into most certain destruction.” Evangelicals are in great danger of being “exposed naked to Satan.” The purpose of this article is to bring this soul-destroying

Geoffrey J. Paxton is an Anglican clergyman and president of the Queensland Bible Institute, Brisbane, Australia.

confiscation into the light and thereby sound a serious warning to those who would unthinkingly surrender the priceless treasure of an open Bible.

Satan's ways are subtle. He seeks to cover up a most serious illness with would-be evidence of health. How dare we speak of a confiscation of the Scriptures in an age of unprecedented proliferation of Bibles and their spectacular distribution? Who has the gall to speak of a snatching away of the Word to the evangelical who proudly carries his Bible under his arm on the way to church?

Yes, the ways of Satan are subtle. The father of darkness and despair comes as an angel of light and buoyancy. Beware, believer!

We dare to suggest that the present-day confiscation of the Scriptures from the people of God is a confiscation more subtle and, if possible, even more dangerous than that of taking away the material Bible from men and women. This devilish confiscation takes place while the Scripture remains in our hands or on our living room tables—yes, even while we are looking through its pages.

What, then, is the *nature* of this seizure? In what does this Christ-hating and Christian-hating confiscation consist?

The Holy Scriptures are taken from the people of God by rendering them incapable of reading the message *from* these Scriptures. In so many cases today, when the evangelical comes to the Bible, he comes *with* a message instead of *for* the message. The Bible has become the venerated and often eulogized ratifier of alien messages.

The evangelical hugs his Bible and opens it often, but he is blind and cannot see what it is saying. The evil one has robbed him of his sight and hearing, but still permits him to look and listen.

Looking without seeing, listening without hearing! Once people could not see because they could not look (pre-Reformation era). Now they can look, but they cannot see. A plague is devastating evangelicaldom while there is singing in the churches.

The time is for weeping. The time is for the beating of the breast and for sackcloth and ashes. Our eyes have been gouged out!

How has Satan brought about such a devastation? How has he stripped us of our clothing and made us to stand before him naked and defenseless? He has done it by a *reordination*.

At the time of the Reformation and through the preaching of the Word, God, as it were, ordained *all* believers to the priesthood. Naturally, this was (and still is) most disturbing to a group of priests who believed that they had special entree into the counsel of God. Under the caption of "The Priesthood of All Believers," one huge ordination service took place by the preaching of the Word and the power of the Holy Ghost.

But the archenemy of God and His people dedi-



cated himself to the task of again reordaining a select few to a special priesthood. However, he vowed that he would be more subtle this time. His priests would have just as strong a stranglehold on the people, but they would be fervent advocates of the priesthood of all! Those being strangled would have all the disadvantages of being strangled, but would think themselves the most blessed of all men.

Who are these newly reordained priests of Protestantism? Who are these who have been set aside from the common members of the body of Christ?

First, there are the high-priestly *critics*. Though they are hated and scorned by the common priests of evangelicaldom, yet they exercise a decisive though subtle influence on the church. Such high priests have worked their way into evangelical colleges of Bible and theology, and have taken on the grand role of dictators



of the curriculum. True, they are scorned in those colleges, and their works are “answered” from the lectern by the professors. But that is just the point! For this leaves little time for the real task of training in the proper *use* and *ministry* of the Word. Answering critics and intensive preparation in the proper use of sacred writ do not go too well together, as most “theologs” will testify.

Such influence is exercised over the people by the high-priestly critics that they have taken prior attention to the Word itself. The Word is snatched away from the one in training by men who have a demonic stranglehold over educational leaders. These high priests have demanded recognition and precious training time as a *sine qua non* of accreditation.

This is not a plea for obscurantism or unscholarly theological education, but for a more intensive application to the meaning of the Word and its effective communication to the people of God who sit in church with uplifted eyes in the direction of the pulpit. Can we not see how Satan is exposing believers by this *predominance* of critical material in our training colleges?

Second, there are the high-priestly *champions of holiness*. Here is a castle of priests who resemble the champion athletes with whom we are familiar. They have distinguished themselves in the race of holiness; they have breasted the tape of the inner sanctuary of the Lord. These men are held up before the great masses of Christians in training as examples of superior humility and athletic ability. They exert a twofold tyranny over the people—the *common* people—of the Lord:

1. They are the examples of a superior “blessing” to that of the common Christian. With astonishing humility, they have found the secret of a “deeper” experience which all may have if only the cost will be met



(cf. *They Have Found the Secret*, by V. Raymond Edman). The result, of course, is a two-layer Christian community—the rich and the poor, the spiritual champions and the great mass of athletes. Thus is developed a new set of mediators who speak out of the depths of their own conquests—conquests which are the more powerfully communicated by disclaiming that they are “of us” at all!—and seek to lead the masses into a like stratum of achievement.

2. More serious still, such high priests usually go into print (some quite prolifically) and hold forth on the text of Scripture. The great proportion of their writing is characterized by two elements: the “experience” is determinative of the exposition, and, as we might expect, there is a very bad use of the Bible. The text is pushed and battered into the mold of an alien message. (This writer has begun to examine again some of this litera-



ture, and examples of a devastating use of the Bible are as follows: *Victorious Christian Living: Studies in the Book of Joshua*, by Alan Redpath; *The Saving Life of Christ*, by W. Ian Thomas; *Born Crucified and Crowded to Christ*, both by L. E. Maxwell; and *Rivers of Living Water*, by Ruth Paxson.)

The tragedy—and the reason for raising this matter at all—is that the great mass of sincere evangelical Christians are influenced by such books in their reading of the Bible. These books form the literary medium through which the Bible is read. The Word is snatched away from the common members of the Body by the *new system of exposition* which these high priests have brought to the church.

What are some of the features of this new exposition?

a. *There is an almost complete disregard for sound principles of biblical interpretation.* The Bible is handled, not according to sound hermeneutical principles, but in accordance with the preconceived message that the expositor wishes to illustrate from the Scriptures (cf. Redpath's exposition of the meaning of the book of Joshua). The fact remains that the Bible is not primarily an illustrative source book. If the message is not in the text, it ought not to be in the exposition.

b. *The central message of justification by faith is minimized and relegated to a starting-point status in Christian experience.* The all-consuming interest is a sanctification which is not a reality in the great majority of believers. (Redpath says, "We may be justified, but we may not be sanctified."—Alan Redpath, *Victorious Christian Living: Studies in the Book of Joshua*, p. 248.) This sanctification has been provided by God in Christ and is intended by God for all, but is only "realized," "made effective," "appropriated" by the half-clothed believer.

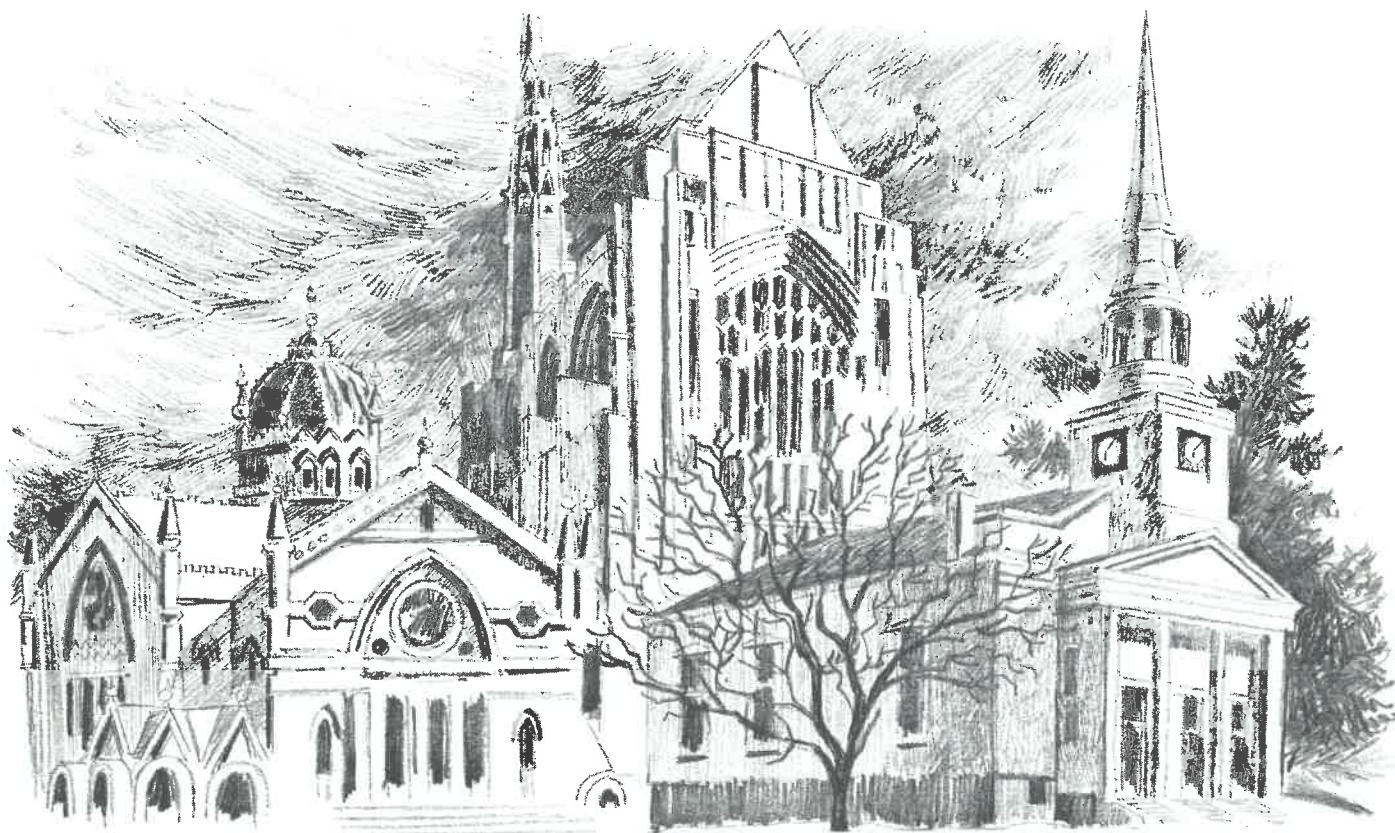
c. *The result, of course, is that the whole Bible is clapped into the iron mold of the new *modus operandi*.* Many Christians find it well-nigh impossible to see the text other than as it is treated—maltreated!—by the new high-priestly expositors. The "new sense" is superimposed on the "*sensus literalis*" of the Scripture itself.

"Exposed naked to Satan"! Cast "into most certain destruction"! Alas, the time for repentance is here. We have lost the Word. We have been blinded by a light that is not from God. Let us make our way to the grave and weep over the buried Word!

The problem which faces modern-day evangelicalism is of frightening proportions. We have to hack our way through a veritable jungle of books and pamphlets to reach the Word of the living God. Perhaps we ought to have a mass burning and start afresh. Who knows the liberation that might thus come to the church!

Our contention is that the people of God have been once again robbed of the Scriptures by a Satanic reordination of certain priests to a high-priestly ministry. We have spoken of the high-priestly *critic* and the high-priestly *champion of holiness*. Both, in their own way, are being satanically used to bring about a dearth of sound biblical knowledge. We call for widespread repentance!

In conclusion, the influence of these high priests—particularly of the latter class—is evidenced by the fact that to speak as we have done in this article is considered to be something "not done." These high priests are regarded as so sacrosanct that to claim they handle the Bible incorrectly is well-nigh unheard of. It is not that no one knows the Bible is being butchered, but that almost all realize that great unpopularity may be expected if "sacred cows" are spoken of in anything but glowing terms. Yet the fact remains that Scripture is supreme and *all* have to be brought to the bar of the Word. We invite the reading public to see this article as a challenge to test by the clear word of Scripture the writings of those we have mentioned. And what we ask of them we willingly submit to ourselves. True repentance will mean coming out into the open and asking afresh, "What saith the Lord—in His Word?"



Justification by Faith and the Clarity of the Bible

Robert D. Brinsmead

PART 1: Justification—the Key to Biblical Clarity

Is the Bible clear and easy to understand? Has the proliferation of divisions within the Protestant movement proved that the Reformers were too optimistic in affirming the clarity of the Bible? If it is clear, why are so many professed Christians so incredibly ignorant of the Bible?

When the Reformers contended that the Bible is clear and easy to understand, they did not mean that it is comprehensively clear. Obviously, there are difficulties and mysteries about certain parts of the Bible that may never become clear in this life. Neither did the Reformers close their eyes to the fact that men of scholarship and mental acumen had failed to understand the Bible. But what they did mean was that the Bible is essentially clear when seen in the light of the great Reformation doctrine of justification by faith.

The formal principle of the Reformation (the Bible alone) and the material principle of the Reformation (justification by faith in Christ alone) stand together. If one is lost, so is the other. Said Luther:

If the article of justification is lost, all Christian doctrine is lost at the same time. . . . it alone makes a person a theologian. . . . For with it comes the Holy Spirit, who enlightens the heart by it and keeps it in the true certain understanding so that it is able precisely and plainly to distinguish and judge all other articles of faith, and forcefully to sustain them.—*What Luther Says*, ed. E. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), Vol. 2, pp. 702-714, 715-718.

If these statements by Luther are correct—and we believe they are—this means that there is one great reason why the Bible is not clear in today's church. We have lost sight of the truth of justification by faith! Let this central biblical message be restored to its right place, and the Bible will become essentially clear.

PART 2: Justification Illuminates All Other Truths

The Bible is the record of the saving action of a holy and gracious God. His righteousness is not presented as an abstract quality, but as something which is revealed in concrete, historical events. God moves into the tragic human situation, and His righteousness be-

comes a dynamic reality. He delivers a handful of believers from the flood, Lot from the flames of Sodom, Israel from the bondage of Egypt, Hezekiah from the threats of Sennacherib, the Jews from their captivity in Babylon, and the Psalmist from the plots of his enemies. And all these Old Testament deliverances point forward to that culminating act of righteousness when God Himself comes to this earth in the flesh and blood reality of Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ we see that He is the God who is with us in bodily infirmities, poverty, suffering, loneliness and death. In Jesus Christ He is also seen as the God who is for us in the face of everything that is against us. He comes thus to us because His love calls Him that way. In our alienation from God, only God can help us. He therefore, because of love, must leave all, give all, and suffer all. Neither does He fail nor is He discouraged until He visits and redeems His people in His glorious redemptive act.

This saving action of God which was carried out in Jesus Christ is what the Bible calls "the righteousness of God." Rom. 1:17. It is efficacious for all who believe. That is what the entire Bible is about. When the Bible is read and understood in this framework, its message is as clear as the noonday. But if the theme of Christ and justification by faith in Him slips out of sight or is even moved from the center, the Bible is no longer clear. It becomes pulled about as if it were a fantastic "dispensational" jigsaw puzzle, mutilated into a manual of self-improvement, wrested to sanction any number of bizarre religious experiences, or exploited by those who imagine that they have God's information about forthcoming events in international politics.

Even doctrines which are true in themselves lose their vitality and color when they are abstracted from the biblical framework. The Bible is like a living organism with a living, pulsating heart. When doctrines are separated from that heart, they become artificial, sterile and lifeless. They will often assume an altogether different color than the biblical one.

In the first tract written to the English people on behalf of the Reformation, John Bugenhagen declared, "We have only one doctrine: Christ is our righteousness."—Quoted in J. P. Mozley, *William Tyndale*, p. 54. That epitomized the spirit of the Reformation—the spirit which was to a great extent lost in the age of Protestant scholasticism which followed. The "only one doctrine" emphasis of the Reformers did not mean that they ignored other essential doctrines. But they saw the truth of justification by faith in Christ as embracing every other doctrine. It is not good enough to relegate the article of justification by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith to merely one article of fundamental belief among about twenty others. It must become the great center, the strategic vantage point from which we view all other doctrines. For the doctrine of justification by faith, rightly considered, pre-



supposes or implies every other biblical doctrine. It makes the other doctrines clear and invests them with influence and importance as they are seen in relation to this living heart of biblical revelation. For example:

The Trinity

The Bible does not present us with a list of abstract doctrines to be believed. Men and their institutions do that sort of thing, but not the Word of the living God. It is like a living organism which loses its life when dissected.

Too often we present the doctrine of the Trinity as a dry theological abstraction. The Bible does not do that. Where in the Bible can be found the doctrine of the Trinity spelled out as an isolated doctrine? It is not done. But the central biblical message about justification by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith makes the truth of the Trinity to shine with saving reality (see Rom. 3:24-26).

"... being justified freely by His grace. . . ." Here we are brought to contemplate the source of salvation in the heart of God the holy father.

"... through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus

... His blood. . . ." This points us to the ground of our acceptance in the doing and dying of God the holy Son.

"... through faith. . . ." Since the Bible everywhere testifies that we cannot of ourselves come to God or believe in Jesus Christ, this points us to the way in which salvation is applied to our hearts by the work of God the Holy Spirit.

Instead of preaching on the doctrine of the Trinity in an abstract way, how much better to present the matter in the real biblical framework of God's saving action! "For God so loved the world (the efficient cause of our obtaining eternal life is the mercy of the heavenly Father), that He gave His only begotten Son (the material cause is Christ, with His obedience, through which He acquired righteousness for us), that whosoever believeth on Him (the instrumental cause is faith, which comes by the Spirit's illumination of the gospel message) should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16.¹

Creation, Law, and Human Depravity

When Paul spells out the great message of justification by faith in the book of Romans, how naturally he takes up the doctrines of creation, the law's inexorable demand for righteousness, and the radical sinfulness of all men.

Redemption implies creation and a Redeemer who is also the Creator. The messenger who proclaims the everlasting gospel points to "Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters" (Rev. 14:6, 7). Christianity is a historical religion. It not only stands or falls on the historical reality of Jesus Christ, who is called "the last Adam," but on the historical reality of the first Adam in Paradise.

The doctrine of justification by faith implies the inexorable nature of God's moral law. *Justification* is a term of law. It means "setting one right before the law."—A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 856. As the righteous Creator, God insists that the demands of His law be fully met. The final judgment will proceed accordingly (Rom. 2:12-16).

When God sent His Son into this world, it was not to get around the law. Much less was it to modify or relax the law's demand for perfect righteousness. He sent His Son to provide for us what the law demanded in precept and penalty. The first thing that Paul teaches in the doctrine of justification is that the divine law is not set aside by his doctrine of faith. Law is established and vindicated (Rom. 3:31). The fact that God could not spare His own Son but shed His blood to meet the just requirements of the law proves that God will not, cannot change His law one hair's breadth even to save a universe of sinners. Grace does not save anybody in a way that would jeopardize the moral order

Grace does not save anybody in a way that would jeopardize the moral order of the universe.

Calvary was not only God's act of mercy, but an act of highest respect for His own law.

¹This brief exposition of John 3:16 is found in John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bk. 3, chap. 14, secs. 17, 21.



of the universe. The cross with its bleeding Victim makes it dramatically clear that the moral law cannot be defied with impunity. We live in a universe where all debts must be paid. Calvary was not only God's act of mercy, but an act of highest respect for His own law. If ethics are taught in any other context, they are not Christian ethics.

The message of grace alone, Christ alone and faith alone presupposes man's utter lostness. The *alone* underlines the fact that the fallen sinner can make no contribution to his salvation. The infinite price of redemption, even the blood of the Lord of glory, makes it clear that every human work is valueless to procure salvation. Grace alone means to be accepted in spite of being unacceptable. Christ alone means that we have absolutely no righteousness before God but Jesus Christ. Faith alone means that we confess that the only thing about us which is good is that God has

pronounced us good out of sheer mercy and for the sake of Jesus Christ.

The Bible does not present an abstract theory of human sinfulness. Just as a tree is known by its fruit, so the depth of human sin can only be known by its consequences. Sin cost Adam and Eve their home in Paradise and a son torn from them by the murderer's hand. It cost the Jews their beloved city and their children who were carried away by rapacious armies. But even that could but dimly portray the cost of sin. It cost God a sacrifice so infinite that it contained all the accumulated treasure of eternity. He must give the Son of His love over to the murderer's hand—and the murderer in this case was man for whom He gives all to redeem. Sin is the crime of Calvary, and only God's act on Calvary could wipe it out. This is the only context—the biblical context—in which to deal with the doctrine of human depravity.

Election

The doctrine of election should not be presented as a philosophical or speculative concept that inevitably burdens the church with intolerable pastoral problems. When abstracted from the biblical framework, it has appeared before people as if the doctrine of predestination were a hardfisted, arbitrary determinism that drives men from God rather than draws them to him. John Wesley was provoked to lash out against this in a torrent of eloquent fury. In such reactions, of course, we are prone to throw out both the baby and the bath water.

The Bible gives election its proper framework when it presents it as election "in Christ" (Eph. 1:4). Salvation is wholly due to God's initiative in Jesus Christ. He sought, chose and found us. We did not seek, choose and find Him. Our salvation is grounded in His prior decision to save humanity in the Person of Jesus Christ. Therefore the "full assurance of faith" does not rest on the slender thread of our own fickle decisions. Our faith can never be a contribution or cause of our election, since God elected this Man Jesus Christ on our behalf long before we came to faith. Our faith can only be an echo of "the faith of God." Rom. 3:3. He staked His all on Jesus Christ from all eternity.

The Divine-Human Christ

The Chalcedonian formula of the hypostatic union of Christ's two natures is a brilliant piece of doctrinal orthodoxy. But it will not hit a sinner in the center of his being unless it is presented in the biblical framework of God's saving action in Jesus Christ.

This writer well remembers the occasion when a certain gentleman wanted to argue for an Arian Christ. He was asked to leave his questions aside until he had listened to a presentation on the atonement. As he was confronted with the infinite gulf of sin and the work required to reconcile us to God, he saw that only a divine Person could accomplish such a work. This was no longer a doctrinal abstraction for the man to argue about. It was something which involved God and him on the deepest personal level.

Since it was from man that justice required perfect righteousness, Christ must become Man as man was meant to be. That righteousness which faith can accept as valid before God must be a flesh and blood reality. "For since by man came death, by Man came also the resurrection of the dead." 1 Cor. 15:21. We are not saved by a set of doctrinal abstractions, but by an actual Life in Palestine and a gruesome execution under the reign of Pontius Pilate. It is as down to earth as that!

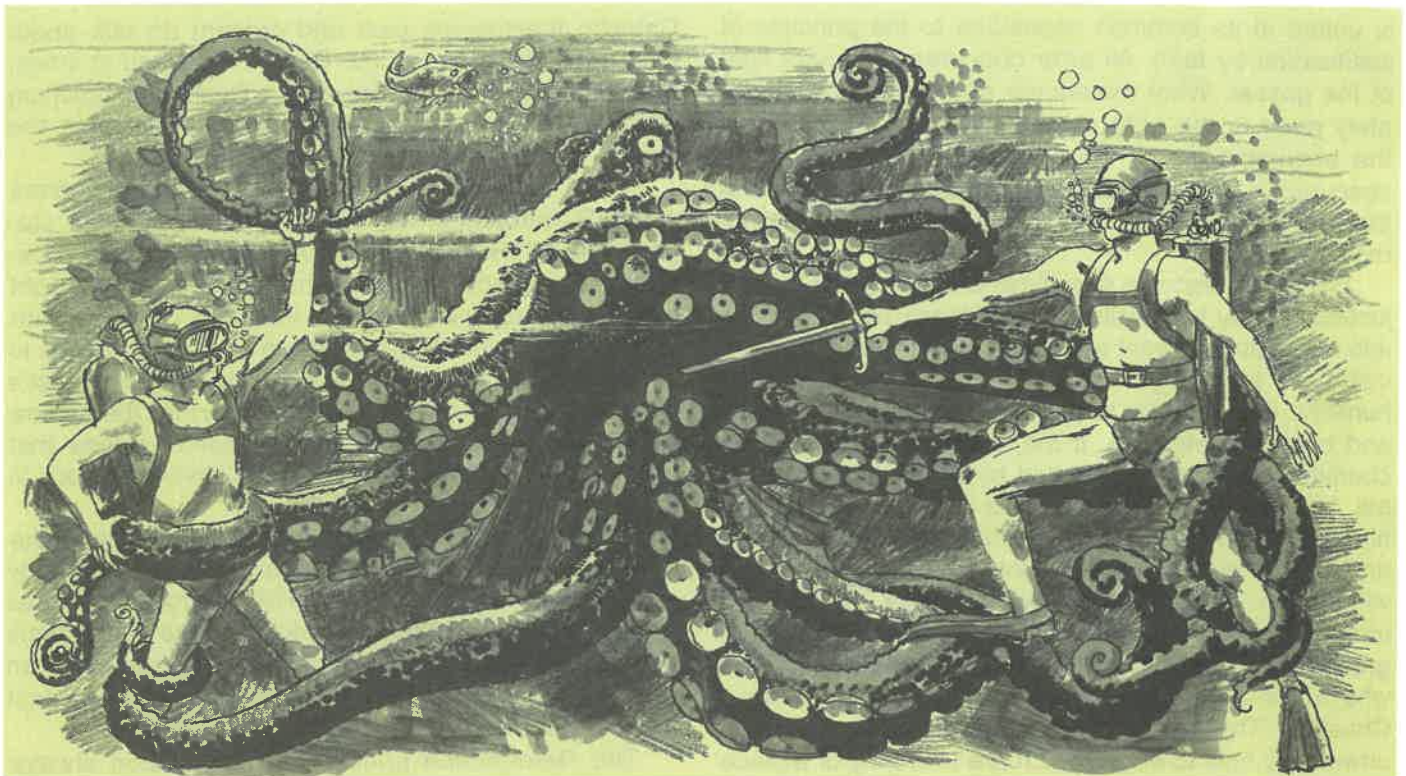
Upon a life I never lived
And upon a death I did not die
I stake my whole eternity.

God has shown us the nature of hell and death, for in the cross of Christ "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Rom. 1:18

Final Judgment

The doctrine of the final rewards and punishments is illuminated by the cross of Christ. "He who by faith is justified shall live." Rom. 1:17. In the One who was raised for our justification (Rom 4:25) and who bodily ascended to glory at God's right hand we are given a clear preview of eschatology. The saints shall be "glorified together" with Christ.

While he who believes is justified unto life eternal, he who believes not is condemned. The wrath of God abides on him (John 3:36). We are not left to speculate about the temperature of hell and all the fantastic and unbiblical ideas that some people propound in the doctrine of the hereafter. God has shown us the nature of hell and death, for in the cross of Christ "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Rom. 1:18. Christ's cry of dereliction, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" was His descent into hell—into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is what killed Christ. As we follow the bruised and lifeless body of the Saviour to the tomb, we see clearly what are the wages of sin—*death*. Death is no phantom, but it is God's judgment on the whole man. It is as concrete and as real as the execution and burial of Jesus Christ. In this also has God given us a clear view of what will happen to the damned. Jesus Christ is the truth of the life hereafter. He is the whole truth about God and the whole truth about man. All the essential doctrines of the Bible are clear when they are seen "as the truth is in Jesus." Eph. 4:21.



PART 3: Justification Exposes All Errors

If the doctrine of justification by faith illuminates all other doctrines, it exposes all errors at the same time. It is a divine plumb line to test every doctrinal structure. It is a principle that must call all our creeds, ideas and traditions into radical question.

Perhaps this is one reason why the church has unconsciously pushed the Reformation doctrine into the background. If it is allowed to stand in the forefront, it is too revolutionary and might upset the status quo. Following a seminar on justification conducted by the Australian Forum, one of the leaders of a certain religious institution was heard saying, "What we have heard is very good; but how are we going to fit it in with our system?" T. F. Torrance is right when he says, "There is scarcely a Church that claims to be *ecclesia reformata* that can truthfully claim to be *semper reformanda*."²—Art. "Justification," *Christianity Divided* (London & New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961), p. 300.

Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda is a confession that the Reformation was not completed with Luther and Calvin. The sanctuary of truth must yet be cleansed from all the errors that were smuggled in under the cover of the Dark Ages. We have no reason to suppose the restoration was completed by the Reformers.

²This is a Reformation slogan which means *the church reformed and always reforming*. It implies that the church is not truly reformed unless it continues to reform.

Error is like an octopus. It has many tentacles, but one heart. Most of the books written to expose the errors of certain cults or false systems tediously fight with all the tentacles of the doctrinal octopus. Few there are which effectively slay it at the heart with the sharp sword of justification by faith.

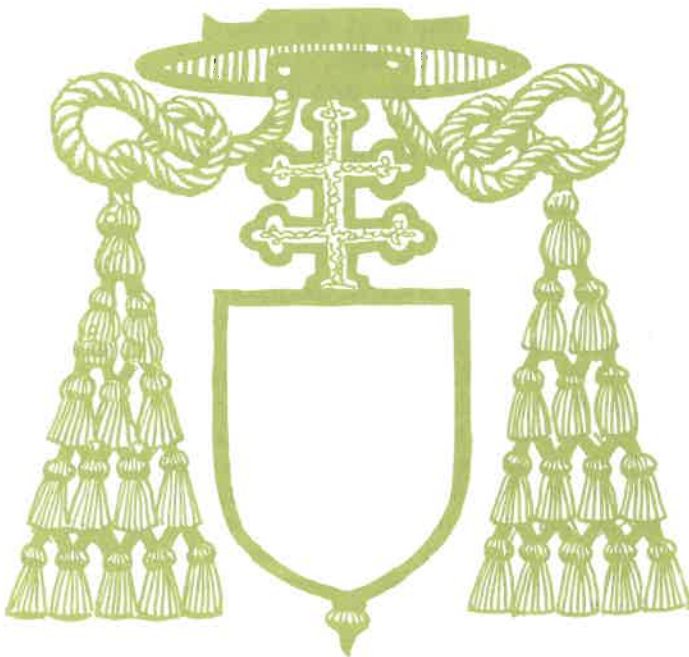
Look how Luther dealt with the papacy. Others before and after him spent their energies crying out against the abuses of Rome. Said Luther:

Doubtless this one article [justification], by little and little, as it began, had overthrown the whole papacy, with all her brotherhoods, pardons, religious orders, relics, ceremonies, invocation of saints, purgatory, masses, watchings, vows, and infinite other like abominations. . . . We moreover did teach and urge nothing but this article of justification, which alone at that time did threaten the authority of the Pope and lay waste his kingdom. . . . Images and other abuses in the church would have fallen down of themselves, if they [the sects] had but diligently taught the article of justification. . . . For I have taken away the kernal and leave him the husks. They contrariwise do take away the husks and leave him the kernal.—Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, Middleton ed., pp. 218, 219.

Luther has been called the greatest reductionist in the history of the church. He cut through the complicated maze of medieval theology and reduced all theology to the principle of *sola fide*. The Christian church today is inundated with *isms* of every stripe and hue. We could spend forever and aye fighting the tentacles of error, but we need to get to the heart. All error

is united in its common opposition to the principle of justification by faith. All error obscures the bright light of the gospel. What the church and the world desperately need is the truth of justification by faith without the encumbrance of the popular errors which have obscured it. We must be courageous enough to let the truth of justification by Christ alone call them all into radical question.

Before we become specific and see how the truth of justification by faith calls some of these popular errors into question, we want to commit ourselves to the principles of "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15) and humility. It is so easy to put ourselves in our opinions and become defensive. If the reader finds one of his cherished opinions challenged by the light of the gospel, let it be understood that this is not a challenge to his Christian integrity. We all have many things to learn and many, many things to unlearn. None of us are without sin. None of us are without error. Church history has demonstrated that great saints have held great errors. We do not in the least imply that a person who holds a position we consider erroneous is not a Christian. That would be a denial of grace. Often we unwittingly hold to errors which are unworthy of a place alongside "the common faith" by which we are saved. And finally, we do not exclude our own views from the ones that need to be called into question by the truth of the gospel.



Romanism

The doctrine of justification by God's mercy alone, on the grounds of what Christ has already done, and through the vicarious righteousness of Christ which is imputed to faith alone, is a radical "No" to Romanism. In saying this we are not ignorant of the fact that

Catholic theologians past and present do talk about justification by grace alone, Christ alone, and at times, by faith alone. We must not charge Rome with teaching an overt works-righteousness. That would miss the point.

While Roman theologians may use all the slogans of the Reformation, this does not mean that the slogans have the same content. According to them, "justification by grace" means to be righteous in the sight of God because the soul is inwardly adorned with grace (*gratia infusa*). "Justification by Christ" means to be made righteous by the actual indwelling of Christ's pure life which is substituted (internally) for the impure life of the sinner. "Justification by faith" means that faith itself as a *qualitas* makes the believer righteous in the sight of God.

While thousands of Protestants may applaud the wonderful changes taking place in Rome, in reality nothing has changed at all! The church which has proved herself capable of adopting the institutions of paganism and adapting them to her own use can also adopt the slogans of Protestantism and adapt them to her own use.

The Reformation principle of justification always points to the saving realities which are completely outside of man. *Grace* is pure mercy which is outside of man in the heart of God. The *righteousness* which justifies is outside of man, for it is the obedience which Jesus Christ performed two thousand years ago. In justification this righteousness is not infused, but *imputed*. It is not in man, who is on earth, but in Christ, who is in heaven. Faith justifies, not because it has any intrinsic merit, but solely because it is the instrument which accepts the imputed gift. Justification by faith means that I live in the favor of God by the righteousness which is found in Another. It means to be accepted as righteous because Another is righteous. In every way it leads me "to the Rock which is higher than I."

What happens in Romanism is that everything is internalized. The words *grace*, *righteousness*, *justification*, *substitution* may remain, but they no longer have that outside-of-me meaning. The work of the Holy Spirit *in us* is substituted for the work of Christ *for us* as the "formal cause" of pardon and acceptance. The inward renewal of the believer is put in the place of the imputed righteousness of Christ. God's transforming act *in man* completely overshadows God's redemptive act *for man*. The focus of attention is not outward, but inward; not in heaven at the right hand of God, but "in the cave of the heart" and in "the new interior life."

We deal with Rome at the head of all the religious *isms* because she is the "mother" of "the abominations of the earth" (see Rev. 17:5). It is this system which most perfectly epitomizes all false religions. Every devious *ism* can find its true home here, for the common denominator of all false religion is its preoccupation with the interior life of the worshiper.



Pentecostalism

The truth of justification by faith calls the whole Pentecostal-charismatic movement into question. No one can come to grips with the realities of justification by faith and at the same time subscribe to the basic principles of Pentecostalism.

We do not deny that there are true Christians who subscribe to the Pentecostal thesis. To deny this would be to deny grace. Many Pentecostals have written and told us that they believe in justification by faith. We thank God for that. Our plea to them is that together we allow the radical implications of justification by faith to call our ideas and practices into question. There are four points that could be raised about Pentecostalism in the light of justification:

1. When God justifies the fallen sinner for the sake of Christ alone, He does this by ascribing to the believer all that Christ did in His holy obedience on our behalf. All that Christ is in glorified humanity at God's right hand—that is to say, all His unconquerable righteousness with all that it merits and inherits—belongs to the needy sinner who joins himself to Christ in living faith. This is the gift that comprehends and swallows up all else.

Now if our Pentecostal friends confess with us the magnitude of this gift of justification, why do they talk about the experience of being baptized in the Spirit as if it were something higher and better than what every believer in Jesus possesses?

The present gift of the Holy Spirit is only the "down payment" (Eph. 1:13, 14) of what we have been given in Jesus Christ. The grace of justification is like the water in the whole ocean. The inward experience is like the little shell holding some of that water. A gift which

can be reduced to the dimension of the intrahuman experience of a sinful mortal is not very big after all! An inheritance that could be carried about on one's person or even in a couple of suitcases would not be too fabulous.

2. When Pentecostalism presupposes a second, subsequent experience in addition to God's justification, it implies that the free gift of Christ's righteousness to the believer does not suffice to bring the infilling, or baptism, of the Holy Spirit. But justification means that since Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer, God must not only regard him but treat him as righteous. Is not a justified man righteous with God? Does not God delight in and love to embrace a righteous man? Then why suspend the gracious effusion of the Holy Spirit to a subsequent event? The apostle Paul says that the Spirit comes with the blessing of justification (Rom. 5:1-5; 8:1-10; Gal. 3:1-14; Eph. 1:13; etc.). A justification before God which does not bring the Holy Spirit *abundantly* (Titus 3:5-8) is no justification at all and would merit very little talking about—which is generally the case among charismatic enthusiasts.

3. If the reception of Christ's imputed righteousness by faith alone does not bring with it the abundant gift of the Spirit, other steps or techniques must be resorted to in order to obtain "heaven's best." Here the door is opened to a new kind of legalism. People become obsessed with getting the Spirit by their own acts of "absolute surrender," "total dedication," or "eradication of the self." The attention is turned from the gospel message that Christ has actually won the Spirit for the believer by His own acts of absolute surrender, total dedication, and the putting away of sin which took place on Calvary (Acts 2:33; Gal. 3:13, 14; John 7:38, 39).

Paul reminded the foolish Galatians that the Spirit *came* (Gal. 3:2) and *continues to be given abundantly* (Gal 3:5, literal translation) by the hearing of faith. Gospel preaching is proclaiming how the Spirit comes to men by the conquering acts of Jesus Christ on man's behalf. Galatianism proclaims how men may come to the Spirit.

4. The overwhelming preoccupation of Pentecostalism is the inward life of the believer. Its predominant testimony is to the inward experience of the Spirit rather than to the historical action of God in Jesus Christ. For this reason Pentecostal spirituality is in fundamental harmony with Roman Catholic spirituality (see documentation in *Present Truth*, Special Issue, "Justification by Faith and the Charismatic Move-



ment"). Pentecostalism has been able to bridge the gulf between Romanism and Protestantism, but the traffic across that bridge is mostly one way. Every religious experience which is a denial of justification by faith finds its true home in Rome.

Subjectivism

The doctrine of justification by an imputed (outside-of-me) righteousness directs us to find salvation in a saving event which is completely outside of us. Just as we were constituted sinners by what Adam did in a historical event, so the believer is justified unto life eternal by what Christ did in a historical event (Rom. 5:18, 19). As John Bunyan testified:

As for thy saying that salvation is Christ within, if thou mean in opposition to Christ without, instead of pleading for Christ thou wilt plead against Him; for Christ, God-man, without on the cross, did bring in salvation for sinners; and the right believing of that justifies the soul. Therefore Christ within or the Spirit of Him who did give

Himself a ransom, doth not work out justification for the soul in the soul, but doth lead the soul out of itself and out of what can be done in itself, to look for salvation in that Man that is now absent from His saints on earth. . . .

And indeed they that will follow Christ aright must follow Him without, to the cross without, for justification on Calvary without—that is, they must seek for justification by His obedience without—to the grave without, and to His ascension and intercession in heaven without; and this must be done through the operation of His own Holy Spirit that He has promised shall show these things unto them, being given within them for that purpose. Now the Spirit of Christ, that leads also; but whither? It leads to the Christ without.—*The Riches of Bunyan* (New York: American Tract Society, 1850), pp. 142, 143.

This doctrine of justification is a radical "No" to religious subjectivism. We have already considered two major forms of religious subjectivism—Romanism and Pentecostalism—but it must also be said that the evangelical movement is just about drowned in it too. Evangelicals who utterly internalize the gospel have no

good reason to oppose Pentecostals, for the spirituality is the same.

We wish to make it clear that we are not trying to minimize the necessity of biblical regeneration, the indwelling of the Spirit, and holiness. These things can never be urged too much, and we will have something to say on Bible holiness before we are through. What we are against in the name of the gospel is a distortion of these things which makes them utterly false. For instance:

New Birth. The new birth is a radical change, wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit, which turns the believer from self-centeredness to Christ-centeredness. He lives a new life of faith in the Son of God—continually confessing his sinfulness, always relying on Christ's merits, and habitually obeying His commandments. If we are going to advocate this kind of new birth—and surely it cannot be advocated too much—this can only magnify the glory of Christ's imputed righteousness.

But what often happens is that the new birth experience is put in the room of the imputed righteousness of Christ. It becomes in itself the grand saving event or the "finished work" which guarantees eternal security. Baptism then becomes the grand memorial and celebration of this new life within. The Bible doctrine of salvation and security in an "alien righteousness" is utterly against this perverted concept of new birth.

Christ Within. There is nothing wrong in using the expression, "Let Christ come into your heart," if it is used in a biblical framework. Then it would simply mean believing on Jesus Christ. To believe on Christ savingly means that the message about what He has done for us and what He is to us has hit us in the center of our being. It has captured our thoughts, our imagination, our affections, our will. It means that our whole mind is possessed by the Spirit's revelation of the gospel of Christ. We believe that God raised Him from the dead. We believe that He is our Man in heaven before God's face. We believe that He is our only righteousness at the bar of eternal justice. We believe He loves us and inscribes our names in His heart, or in the Book of Life. We believe He is coming again. Our whole life is now lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us. This is what it means to have Christ living in our hearts by faith (Eph. 3:17; Gal. 2:20). Such a life of faith is possible only by the Holy Spirit's indwelling.

This age calls for clear discernment on the part of God's people because the same words and expressions can have totally different meanings. We have seen how Rome can use the very slogans of the Reformation and yet mean something totally different. The same thing happens with the expression, "Let

Christ come into your heart." People get the idea that Christ comes substantially into their hearts so that their inward experience itself becomes "the hope of glory." Instead of directing their whole attention to the majestic, incomparable Person of Christ as exalted Lord in the throne room of God's heavenly temple (Heb. 8:1, 2; Rev. 11:19), they focus on the human heart as the real throne room of the Lord of glory.

A certain crusade leader proudly introduced his latest convert to this editor in the city of Denver. "Tell him about your experience, Harry," said the leader. "Jesus Christ has become so real to me," beamed Harry as he clutched his very over-sized belly, "because I've got him right in here." This sort of talk is dishonoring to the majesty and glory of the Christ who presides at the right hand of God.

The Spirit-filled Life. The truth of justification by faith means preoccupation with Christ's experience and not our own. This is what frees us from egocentric concerns so that we may live lives of holiness (Isa. 53:11). It sets us at liberty to live for God's glory rather than our own. Much of the current enthusiasm for the "Spirit-filled life" bears little resemblance to the Spirit-filled witnessing which is recorded in the New Testament. The dissimilarity lies in a totally different understanding of the Holy Spirit's work. William Childs Robinson makes this comparison in his recent book, *The Reformation: A Rediscovery of Grace* (Eerdmans):

Indeed, the enthusiasts so emphasized the sovereign freedom of the Spirit as to sever the connection between the mission of the Spirit and the historical Christ. Their

Evangelicals who utterly internalize the gospel have no good reason to oppose Pentecostals, for the spirituality is the same.

emphasis fell upon the subjective experience of the Spirit in the individual rather than upon the Spirit's mission of enabling the believer to appropriate the redemption wrought by Christ in His incarnate life. . . . God's objective revelation of Himself is the work of Christ; God's subjective revelation that of the Spirit. The Spirit speaks not of Himself; He takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us, thus glorifying Him (John 16: 13-24). In severing this connection, enthusiasm left itself with no objective criterion and exposed itself to the danger of unregulated spirituality. Instead of the saving knowledge of God revealed in Jesus Christ, it offered sundry varieties of religious experience. For, "where the Holy Spirit is sundered from Christ, sooner or later He is always transmuted into quite a different spirit, the spirit of religious man, and finally the human spirit in general." As Luther pointed out, the Holy Spirit is called a witness, because He witnesses to Christ and to no other. The Apostles declare, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord" (2 Cor 4:5). . . .

The true Holy Spirit comes from God, from the ascended Christ, and brings in His hand to shed abroad in our hearts the love of God revealed in the death of Christ for sinners. Consequently it is not enough for a preacher to be a religious genius who fancies that by the recital of his own or some others' current experiences he can awaken the dormant possibilities of religion in the heart of the hearer. Nor is it sufficient to have a philosopher of religion presenting himself as an example of faith or as a possessor of human understanding, or even using the crucifixion of Jesus or the stoning of Stephen as a stimulus to bring an existential decision to a student. While these may give the appearance of devotion to Christ they do not locate the glory of salvation in His atoning work for us. Rather, "the historical revelation of Christ is treated as the stimulus to a subjective spiritual experience in the individual, not as itself the content of that experience. The spiritualist individual experiences his conversion and the resultant spiritual glow rather than Jesus Christ and Him crucified," so that "when he bears testimony, it is to speak of his new found peace and happiness rather than to confess that Jesus is Lord."

Representatives of this school frequently declare that it is not the birth in Bethlehem but the re-birth in their hearts which counts, not the cross on Golgotha but their own dedication to live for eternity rather than time, not His bodily resurrection but their own faith in immortality. But true preaching from the Holy Spirit who came at Pentecost leads the hearer back through all his experiences to the Source of all true and proper experiences; that is, to Jesus Christ. It calls him to no other faith than faith in the Christ who was born in Bethlehem, who died for our sins on Calvary, who rose from the dead on the third day.—pp. 172, 173.

We wish that these penetrating comments by Dr. Robinson could be read and reread by every evangelical company. What he says is the heritage of the Reformation. It is the truth of justification by faith which calls the current evangelical scene into radical question.



Dispensationalism

Our dispensationalist friends do acknowledge the doctrine of justification by faith. We happily recognize this and gladly confess that Christian dispensationalists are no less Christian before God than are we. Our earnest appeal is that the truth of justification by faith, which dispensationalists profess, be allowed to call every system and doctrinal edifice into radical question.

The dispensationalist is comfortable when the doctrine of justification is just one of a number of doctrinal beliefs. But it is a different matter entirely when justifi-



cation by faith becomes so central and all-embracing that it becomes the hermeneutical principle that determines our view of everything else.

No one who genuinely and consistently holds to the apostolic and Reformation principle of justification by faith can be a dispensationalist. It is as simple as that, and for the following reasons:

1. The New Testament everywhere testifies that Christ is the fulfillment of Old Testament hopes and promises. "... that what God promised to the fathers, this He has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus. . . ." Acts 13:32, 33, R.S.V. "For all the promises of God find their Yes (fulfillment) in Him." 2 Cor. 1:20, R.S.V. In Jesus Christ, God has made an end of sin, abolished death, given Israel peace, wisdom, wealth and righteousness. In Him the old order has passed away and all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17). The Old Testament declares, "Behold, the days come. . .," and, "It shall come to pass. . . ." But the New Testament points to Christ and says: "The hour . . . now is. . . ." "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

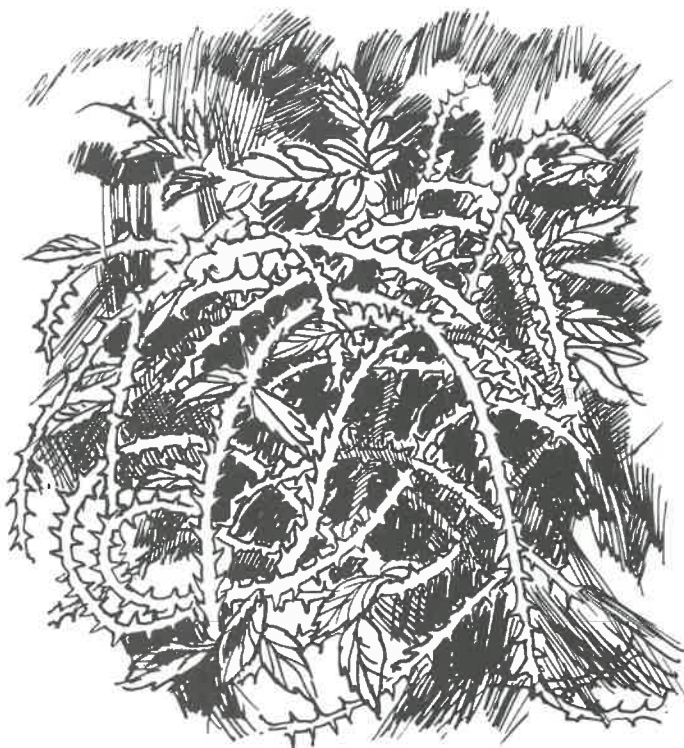
Unless we believe that all that God promised to the Jews has *really* been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, we admit to unbelieving Jews that Jesus is not the true Messiah. Of course, when Jesus comes again, there will be an open disclosure of His victory to the whole world. It has already been accomplished in Him. We believe it and

possess it all by faith. But it will be openly revealed at the end of the world.

2. Paul tells the foolish Galatians in the plainest of terms that justification by Christ (Gal. 2:17) is the blessing which God had promised the seed of Abraham (see Gal. 3). Any Jew who is justified by the righteousness of Jesus Christ has received all that God has promised to Abraham and his posterity.

3. The Gentile Galatians knew that the promises of God were to Abraham and his seed. They desperately wanted to become part of Abraham's family. They were led to believe that this coveted status could be conferred on them by way of circumcision. Paul was indignantly amazed. He told them that this was a denial of the gospel. He declared that Christ was the Seed to whom all the promises were made (Gal. 3:16, 19). He is the Seed of Abraham—that is to say, the Israel of God personified. To belong to Christ is to belong to Israel. "... if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Gal. 3:29. To be in Christ is to be in Israel. "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." Gal. 3:7. Could words be plainer?

How could Christians, above all people, encourage Jews to look to some political events in Palestine for the fulfillment of Old Testament promises instead of



The biblical truth of righteousness by faith means that in this life we are not righteous before God by regeneration, baptism of the Spirit, lives of obedience, or by any inward empirical reality.

pointing to their glorious fulfillment in the Person and work of Jesus Christ? Justification by faith in Christ is the blessing of Abraham. All who have it are children of Abraham without distinction. And these and none else are "the Israel of God." Gal. 6:16. That is why the truth of justification is a radical "No" to dispensationalism. Dispensationalism could only grow in a climate where the doctrine of justification is not central and all-embracing.

In its method of separating the Old Testament from the New Testament, dispensationalism has its roots in the movement called Enthusiasm. Says Dr. Robinson:

In the interests of the continuity of the Church, the Evangelical Church likewise opposes the enthusiasts who separate the Old Testament believers from the New Testament faith. . . . Luther's *Introduction to the Old Testament* shows that this part of the Bible was also a book of faith about such believers as Abraham and David. Bucer accepted the patriarchs, who held to the promises, as men of faith; while for Zwingli and his successor Bullinger, "Abraham participated in the one eternal covenant and rejoiced." God has only one people; our faith is a unit with that of Abraham; the New is the further unfolding of the Old Covenant. Calvin shows that all those whom God has adopted into the society of His people are in the very same covenant, for even the Old Testament saint was offered the hope of immortality, founded on the mere mercy of God and confirmed by the mediation of Christ. (inst. 11, x, 1-4).—*Ibid.*, p. 171.

Perfectionism

The crucial doctrine of Perfectionism is that it is possible for the believer, even before his death, to attain perfection. . . . that the believer is able completely to transcend the pollution of sin. In this respect there is considerable agreement between Perfectionism and Catholicism. —G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), pp. 49, 53.

Perfectionism may assume a number of forms—some more moderate, like that in the teaching of John Wesley, and some quite radical, like the doctrine of sinless perfection found among some sects. There is the holiness doctrine, which advocates a "second blessing" wherein the "old man," or sinful nature, is crucified in the believer in a second crisis experience subsequent to conversion. There is the "absolute surrender" doctrine of Andrew Murray, which proposes that this is the way to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit. There are those who advocate victory-life piety without taking due cognizance of the reality of indwelling sin in all believers. And there are those who talk about the indwelling of Christ or the Spirit in substitutionary terms—i.e., as if the Spirit takes over in such a way that He actually lives the victory life for the Christian.

The Reformation tradition, with all its great creeds and confessions, is hostile to perfectionism because it stands on the primacy, centrality and all-sufficiency of justification by faith. It does not deny the necessity or reality of inwrought holiness, but it also takes cognizance of the reality of indwelling, or original, sin in all believers. Life cannot be fulfilled in the historical process, and the believer confesses that his completeness is realized only in Christ (Col. 2:10). The self-condemning utterances of prophets and apostles throughout the Bible (Eccl. 7:20; Ps. 143:2; Phil. 3:11-14; Rom. 7:14-25; James 3:2; 1 John 1:8) are not excuses for sin, but confessions of sin; and the entire church militant must join them in the confession that human nature is sinful. The biblical truth of *righteousness by faith* means that in this life we are not righteous before God by regeneration, baptism of the Spirit, lives of new obedience, or by any inward, empirical reality. We are righteous with God only by faith—and “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Heb. 11:1. To be inwardly perfect does not belong to the righteousness of faith, but it is the righteousness of reality, of good works, of the law (Rom. 8:4). To be righteous by faith until Jesus comes implies that in ourselves we will be sinners until Jesus comes, for the righteousness of faith is only for sinners.

“Justification by faith (not perfectionism) is really the only answer to the moral perplexities of the doctrine of original sin.”—W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology: An Introduction to the Thirty-nine Articles*, p. 193. It is justification which guarantees our glorification at the end of the world (Rom. 5:1, 2; 8:30). The life of the believer here and now must be lived in the tension of being “perfect in Christ” and pressing on to reach the mark of perfection. Flesh and Spirit must wage a bitter and unrelenting conflict (Gal. 5:17) and hope yearn for the reality of full redemption and righteousness when Christ shall come (Rom. 8:23; Gal. 5:5; Heb. 11:40).

Perfectionism denies the all-sufficiency and centrality, if not the primacy, of justification by faith. It inevitably becomes preoccupied with the inward life. Contrary to the image it seeks to project, perfectionism is not the negation of sin, but the perpetuation of it. In trying to fulfill life and history *here and now*, it robs the believer of his hope in the *there and then*. It is what Berkouwer rightly terms “a premature seizure of the glory that shall be.”

Dualism

It has been a popular belief among many Christians that man possesses a mortal body, but a soul which by very nature is innately immortal. In recent years the best Christian scholarship from the mainstream of the Christian movement has acknowledged that this sort of

thinking is thoroughly Grecian and cannot be substantiated from the Bible. Reformed scholar Herman Hoeksema is certainly not alone when he refers to “the so-called immortality of the soul” and calls it “an error, for the which there is no item of proof in the Word of God; which, in the contrary, is condemned by Scripture throughout. It is one of those doctrines that have been inherited by the church from Platonic philosophy, that have simply been received without criticism and without being judged in the light of Scripture. . . .”—Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Reformed Free Pub. Assoc.), p. 208.

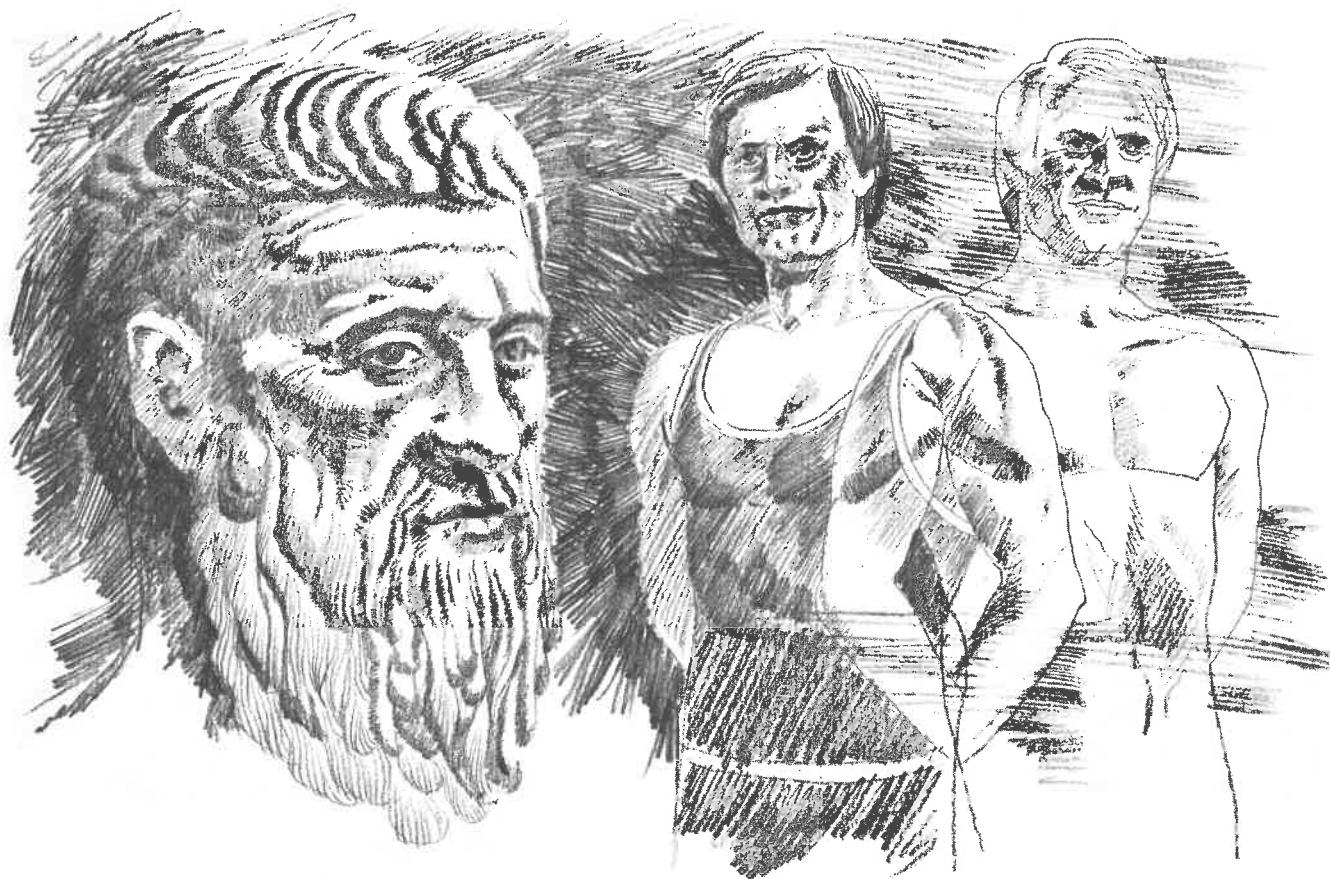
If we are to examine this matter of immortality in the light of Scripture, we should try to think in biblical categories and move within the framework of Scripture. That framework is justification by faith. It is this which calls the entire concept of natural immortality into serious question. When we deal with the matter on this basis, we are not grappling with the tentacles of the octopus, but we get right to its heart.

The saving action of God in Jesus Christ must always be viewed in three moments—the past, the future, and the present.

The Past. The gospel of Christ’s finished work means that, in Christ, God has put away sin, brought in everlasting righteousness, and perfected forever the elect community (Heb. 9:26; 1:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 10:14). Also, He “hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” 2 Tim. 1:10. It ought to be evident that those gifts which are brought to man in the gospel do not belong to him innately.

The Future. All the things which God did in Christ at His first advent, God will bring to us visibly at Christ’s second advent. That is the nature of eschatology—it is the open disclosure of what God has already done. Upon His return at the end of the world, Christ will actually bring us the state of sinlessness, perfection, deathlessness and immortality (Gal. 5:5; Heb. 11:40; Phil. 3:11, 12; Col. 3:2-4; 1 Cor. 15:50-55; Rom. 8:16-23).

The Present. Meanwhile, “in the times between,” the believer possesses all these things *only by faith*. He is without sin and fully righteous only by faith. He is perfect only by faith. He is deathless only by faith. His righteousness and completeness are found only in Christ at God’s right hand. His life is hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). He is not deathless in himself, but in Christ. The inheritance is in heaven, and he is on earth, kept by the power of God through faith (1 Pet. 1:3-5). Justification by faith teaches the believer that his righteousness is outside of himself and in the Person of Christ. And that is where his life and immortality are found. It cannot be otherwise.



The ideas of justification by an inward righteousness and the possession of an inward immortality belong together. Their home is in Rome. Dr. Helmut Thielicke (German Lutheran scholar) points out that the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification by an inherent (infused) righteousness and the concept of inherent immortality belong together:

On Protestant soil this notion of infusion once more crept in after the Reformation. As I see it, however, the logical consequence of this change has not been drawn, namely, a doctrine of immortality which would be substantively parallel to, and in correspondence with, the later doctrine of justification.—Helmut Thielicke, *Death and Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), p. 198.

The righteousness that is valid before God (namely, that vindication which makes me a participant in God's gracious fellowship) is not a quality of my own by virtue of which I am righteous, but God's quality by virtue of which He makes me righteous. . . . Thus our righteousness is the quality of someone else. It is an alien righteousness (*aliena iustitia*). . . .

The notion of infusion also necessarily produces from the same root a new doctrine of immortality, which must operate with the idea that the soul now filled with the divine substance of grace, furnished with *zoe* as it were, cannot succumb to death, but must outlive it.

By contrast the biblical faith rediscovered by Luther knows that both righteousness and *zoe* [life] remain ex-

clusively at God's disposal and that I participate in them only to the degree that fellowship with God in Christ is vouchsafed to me personally, that is, vouchsafed to me for no intrinsic reason at all. . . .

It follows that I dare not regard my death, even under the aspect of biological mask, as something that no longer strikes the real me, since I am immortal, but moves on bypassing my soul. No, all of me goes down into death. Nothing gives me the right to reject the totality of man, which the Scriptures proclaim in connection with the disaster of death, and suddenly split him into body and soul, into a perishable and an imperishable I-segment. But as a Christian I go down into this death with the complete confidence that I cannot remain therein, since I am one whom God has called by name and therefore I shall be called anew on God's day. I am under the protection of the Resurrected One. I am not immortal, but I await my own resurrection. . . .

At this point the reformers' biblical understanding of justification reaches, as it were, its high point. Just as I stand with empty hands before God and remain standing, just as I can only beseech God nevertheless to accept me, in just this fashion do I move into my death with empty hands and without any death-proof substance in my soul, but only with my gaze focused on God's hand and with the petition on my lips, "Hand that will last, hold Thou me fast!"—*Ibid.*, pp. 196-199.

The great doctrine of justification by faith implies that man is utterly bankrupt of righteousness and life except for Jesus Christ, who has graciously become both on the sinner's behalf. Says Anders Nygren in his book, *Eros and Agape* (Harper & Row):

The idea of Immortality of the soul causes offence primarily because it is an expression of man's hybris [insolence] towards God. For Christian faith, salvation from death is a mighty act of God; in the Platonic, Hellenistic view, immortality is a native possession of the human soul. But such a doctrine, from the Christian point of view, is in line with the Fall; it is man's attempt to make himself like God, to make himself God; it is an assault on God's divinity. Instead of taking eternal life from God's hand as a gift of His unmerited Agape, man insists that he possesses it in his own right in virtue of the divine nature of the soul. That is why the idea is godless and blasphemous. —p. 281.

The doctrine of inherent immortality not only provides a link with Rome and, through Rome, back to the mystery religions (see Nygren, *ibid.*, p. 165), but it is a bridge of modern-day spiritism, which itself is becoming so much like Pentecostalism that it is practically impossible to tell the difference. Error is a fantastic network which has one root—its denial of the principle of justification by faith.

We do not deny, but happily acknowledge, that many great and good men have believed in justification by faith and the natural immortality of the soul. This highlights what we mean when we say that the principle of justification by faith must be allowed to call our traditions into radical question. This is the task of the *ecclesia reformata* which can truthfully claim to be *semper reformanda*.

Optionalism

There is a teaching, very widespread in some evangelical circles, which says that if a person once becomes a Christian, he cannot be lost even if he utterly denies the faith in subsequent conduct. This idea makes such a separation between justification and sanctification that it proposes that an unsanctified man can still be justified. We call this *optionalism* because it makes a life of holiness optional as far as salvation is concerned.

This sort of teaching cannot be classed in the Lutheran tradition, for everybody who has read Luther knows that he and the entire Lutheran movement teach that it is possible to fall from grace like the foolish Galatians (Gal. 5:4). Nor can it be classed as Calvinism, because Calvin is emphatic that God justifies no one whom He does not at the same time sanctify. A good Calvinist will say that although salvation is not *by* man's perseverance, yet it will not be *without* man's perseverance. And of course Arminianism is even

more radical than Luther on the possibility of falling from grace. We say these things, not because we think we can base our faith on any tradition, but because some people will even question whether a person is a true Protestant if he questions the way they divorce sanctification from justification.

We need to continually appeal to one another that, no matter how fanatically devoted we may be to a certain theory, we must allow it to be tested by the divine plumb line of justification by faith.

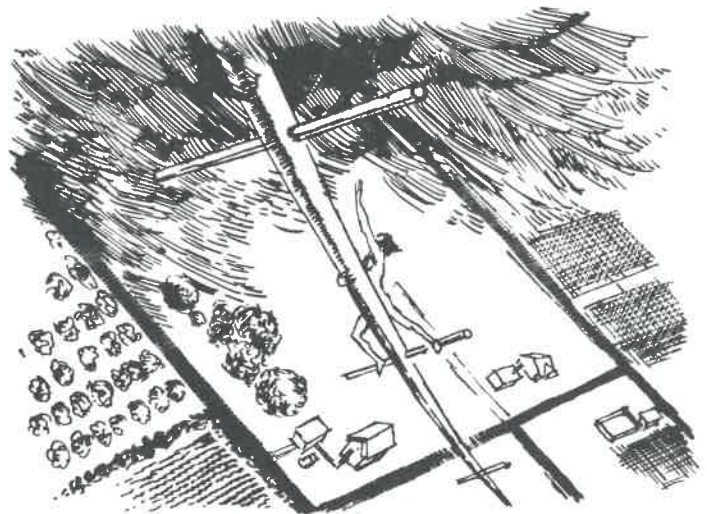
If without adding "by faith," the Bible taught that justification was by grace on the grounds of Christ's righteousness, there might be some grounds for optionalism. But a proper consideration of the conditional "by faith" utterly rules out this possibility.

The assertion of faith as a condition is always closely linked with the most objective declarations concerning *the righteousness of God*: Romans 1:17; 3:22-28; 4; 5:1. The achievement and declaration of salvation are never separated from the appropriation of salvation, because the revealing action in question always stands in the I/Thou relationship. The new thing is from the very first and continually related to faith alone.—*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel (Eerdmans), Vol. 2, p. 206.

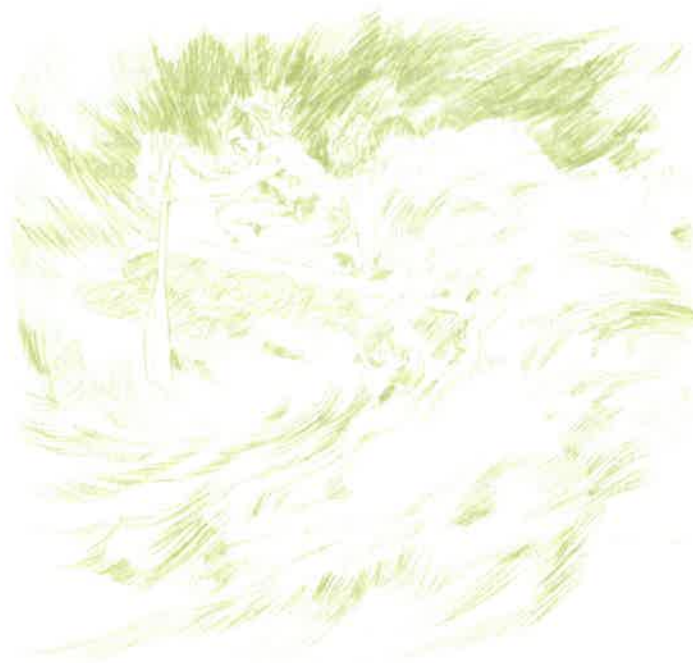
Justification by faith means that only the one who believes (present tense) is justified. In most instances the Greek word for *believe* is in the present tense. He who does not presently believe has no grounds at all for supposing that he is presently justified. A Christian is a believer. He is not just a man who once believed. Faith cannot live without the Holy Spirit, good works, and a life of holiness. Neither can it exist where there is any wicked intention to sin.

We must therefore insist that justification is *by faith*. By faith! As Luther says, he that believes possesses all things, and he that does not believe possesses nothing. Hebrews 11:1 calls faith the "title deeds" ("substance"). Without a present, living, active faith, there is no "title deed" to justification. We do not deny that there is security for the believer. We deny that there is security for an unbeliever.

We have continually drawn attention to the objective (outside-of-me) nature of God's gracious act in justifying the sinner. The saving action of God took place "outside of me" in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the doctrine of justification by *imputation* teaches us that our salvation, righteousness, security, life and immortality are all outside of us in the Person of Christ. But the error which we are here discussing internalizes "the finished work," and it internalizes security. In much of the literature and teaching which we have examined, optionalism equates the new-birth event with the finished work of Christ and leads people to put their faith in this internal experience as the guarantee of their security. In this it is very subjective.



The doctrine of optionalism can only exist where a doctrinal system has been abstracted from the Bible. A person cannot really read the Bible, carefully listening to what it says, and find this teaching *in* there. Getting something *out* of the Bible is quite a different thing from getting it *in* the Bible, when one has to take cognizance of the entire living organism of truth. In the framework of the Bible there are passages to encourage and comfort the believer in the trial of his faith; then there are passages which warn and admonish him about the danger of departing from the faith. We cannot be said to be truly biblical unless we are doing justice to both of these aspects of divine revelation.



Legalism

Legalism bases acceptance with God, ultimately if not initially, on something within man. Fulfillment of the command of God (law) becomes the means to salvation. Like sin, legalism is easier to see in others than in ourselves. Because it is the spirit of sinful man, we are never entirely free from it except by grace. Luther confessed that it was like an oil in his bones.

Legalism can assume a great variety of forms:

First, there is that overt kind of legalism which says that salvation is not *by faith alone*, but by obedience to certain commandments. Some say it is by obedience to the Ten Commandments, while others say it is by obedience to the command of baptism or other evangelical duties.

A more subtle variety of legalism is that which makes obedience to "evangelical" laws the means of salvation. Instead of really preaching the gospel of what Christ has done in winning salvation, it preaches the "gospel" of things man must do—like repentance, confession, surrender, faith, baptism, etc. It is not wrong for advocating the necessity of those things, but because it alters the *ordo salutis*. It leaves the impression that salvation comes into existence when we take the initiative and *do* these things. Salvation becomes the divine response to human action. This brand of legalism preaches how man comes to God. God does nothing for the poor sinner until he takes the necessary steps! Far different is the gospel, which proclaims that the sinner may repent, believe, and be baptized *because* the saving action has already taken place in

Jesus Christ.

Then there is a *pneumatic legalism*, which advocates receiving the Spirit by the fulfillment of all sorts of steps and conditions. The condition for receiving the Spirit is perfect righteousness. Legalism places this condition on the back of the believer, whereas the gospel places it on the shoulders of Jesus Christ.

Finally, there is the legalism of trusting in our orthodoxy. The cold, cruel and intolerant spirit which has often accompanied orthodoxy has produced a dead church. History is stained with the crimes of the Lutheran, Reformed, and other established churches against honest dissenters. Jesus' parable about the unforgiving servant is enacted again and again. Our relationship with God is mirrored in the way we treat our fellow men. It was the spirit of orthodoxy which banished Roger Williams from the colonies. He was forced to find refuge with the Indians. When he was invited to return to the brotherhood of the orthodox, he replied, "I would rather live with Christian savages than live with savage Christians!" Said another, "I would rather be a live heretic than a dead orthodox." I would be more Christian to confess (if we may borrow the words of St. Paul and the dialectic thought of Karl Barth): "O wretched legalist that I am! . . . But I thank God through Jesus Christ I am not the wretched legalist that I know I am."

Legalism has its roots in sinful ignorance—ignorance of the exalted holiness of God's law on the one hand, and ignorance of the defiled and radical corruption of human nature on the other hand. The truth of justification by faith alone exposes this sinful ignorance. It proclaims that the law of God is so infinite in its claims that only the obedience of Him who was filled with all the fulness of the Godhead bodily could satisfy its justice on our behalf. In the light of the inestimable obedience of Jesus Christ, the best we could ever offer the law would be, as Luther said, "rotten stubble and straw."



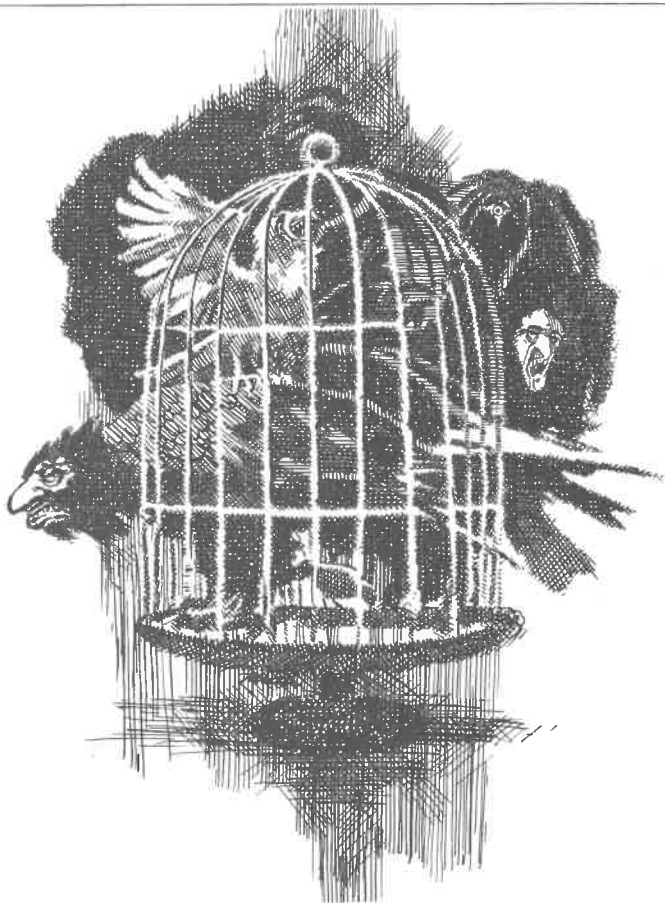
Antinomianism

Antinomianism means *against-the-law-ism*. It views the law itself as the real enemy. It proposes that since the believer is saved by grace alone, he must henceforth have no dealings with the law. The age of the Spirit, it is said, has superseded the age of law.

Antinomianism is the essence of the sinful human condition. ". . . sin is lawlessness," said the apostle John (1 John 3:4, R.S.V.)—and Paul declares, ". . . the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Rom. 8:7.

Antinomianism has always followed the gospel like a dark shadow. Yet it has always been refuted by the mainstream of the church and its great teachers.

Antinomianism in one form or another is undoubtedly the king of all errors in today's church. Conscientious obedience to the objective Word of God is often branded as legalism. As an unprecedented flood of lawlessness, crime and moral corruption is sweeping away the foundations of society, the church itself appears like a shorn Samson before the Philistines. How can a church which has become riddled with antinomian sentiments have any real word of the Lord for a sinful, permissive society? Instead of standing unflinchingly for the moral absolutes of the Ten Commandments, the church is often found accommodating God's law to current social norms.



It is perilous to dialogue about sin. When Eve entered a dialogue with the devil about the forbidden tree, she surrendered her only vantage ground. The mere fact that she would dialogue was compromise. What business has the church to dialogue with the ungodly about the pros and cons of adultery? Now there is a vast horde of sexual deviates who want the church to dialogue about homosexuality! If she will not take God's Word as final and absolute authority, the church will become the "cage of every unclean and hateful bird." If God's Word does not clearly define sin, each man is left to define it for himself. Thus does man—even religious man—blasphemously take the place of God Himself as lawgiver and judge of all!

Antinomianism needs to be recognized in its varied and deceptive plumage. It does not always blatantly say, "Christ has died for our sins so that we can live as we please." That would be too obviously wrong for most Christians to swallow. The lethal pill may be chocolate-coated, sugar-coated, honey-coated, etc.; but it is a lethal pill just the same.

To start with, we have to agree with the Puritan Walter Marshall, who said that legalism is the worst form of antinomianism. Legalism always pretends to honor the law of God. Yet it does not honor the law, but dishonors it. The law of God demands perfect righteousness, and this is satisfied by nothing less than the holy obedience of Jesus Christ. To present to the justice of God's law anything less than the perfect

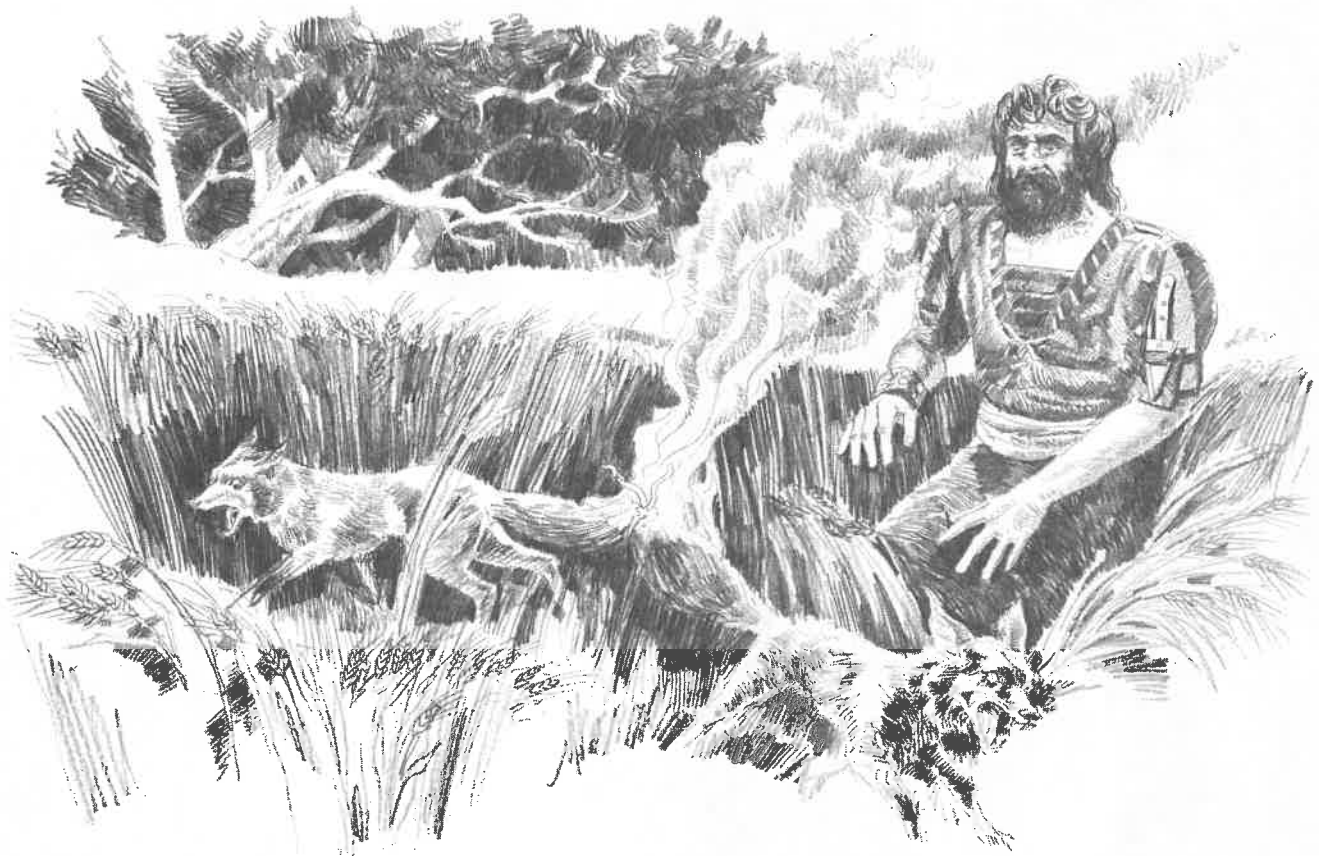
righteousness of Jesus Christ is not *legal* (lawful), but most *illegal* (unlawful). It is inevitable that the legalist must try to cut the law down to his own size. This is what the Pharisees did. In trying to cut the law down to their own puny standard, they actually made void the law through their traditions. On the other hand, Jesus radicalized the law to terrifying proportions. In the light of His exaltation of the law, we see that only in Him is there a righteousness with which the law is well pleased.

But let us not run to the opposite error and brand the spirit of conscientious obedience to the commandments of God as legalism. Calvin was prepared to put his life on the line to keep profane persons from partaking of the elements of the holy communion. That was not legalism. A pious Welsh lassie was given over to the stake by the consent of Cranmer and Ridley because she believed that she must obey God and be baptized by immersion. That was not legalism. Today there are Christians who will not defile their bodies with health destroying habits because they want to thankfully honor God in all their faculties. That is not legalism. It is a corruption of the message of grace when people think they have to live like the world and despise a disciplined, well-ordered life just to prove that they are not legalistic. This lack of Christian discipline is its own form of legalism—the legalism of thinking that such indifference to law makes a man pleasing to God.

Evangelical subjectivism is another form of antinomianism because it tends to substitute the inward experience of "love" or "the Spirit-filled life" for the objective law of God. Without the objective law of God, love becomes blind sentimentalism or situation ethics. Those who are overconfident about being led by the Spirit are in danger of confusing the human spirit with God's Spirit. Who is harder to convince with "It is written" than the enthusiast who is intoxicated with his experience "in the Spirit." The objective Word means nothing when it contradicts his experience.

The notion that love or the Holy Spirit takes the place of the objective law of God goes hand in hand with the teaching of dispensationalism. Dispensationalism proposes that the age of law has been superseded by the age of grace, and sets one against the other. Oswald T. Allis is right when he says that dispensationalism is based on antinomian premises (Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1972), pp. 38-43).

All good theology must have the elements of *distinction* and *union* in the doctrines of the Persons of the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, and soteriology. In soteriology, dispensationalism fails to preserve the necessary union between law and grace, Old Testament and New Testament, justification and sanctification. It often falls into the error of saying that an un-sanctified man may still be justified, or of saying that a



man cannot lose salvation even by willful and persistent sin. This is real antinomianism.

What does the great doctrine of justification by faith say to all these forms of antinomianism?

In the first place, grace justifies the sinner on the grounds of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:18, 19). This righteousness consists in His obedience to the law of God on our behalf. By His sinless life Christ fulfilled the precept of the law, and by His death He satisfied its penalty on behalf of all who would believe on Him. God did not save man by skirting around His law. He did not send His Son to weaken its force or to create a lower standard. As John Flavel said, never was the law of God more highly honored as when the Son of God stood before its bar of justice to make reparations for the damage done.

In the second place, the believing sinner is personally justified when God imputes to him Christ's perfect obedience to the law. This is the Father's robe of righteousness woven in the loom of heaven at such an infinite cost. It is therefore utterly inconceivable that a believer can wear the Father's robe while despising His law. Faith is always inseparable from repentance, which is sorrow for breaking the Father's commandments. Justification is a law term. It means "setting one right before the law."—A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 856.

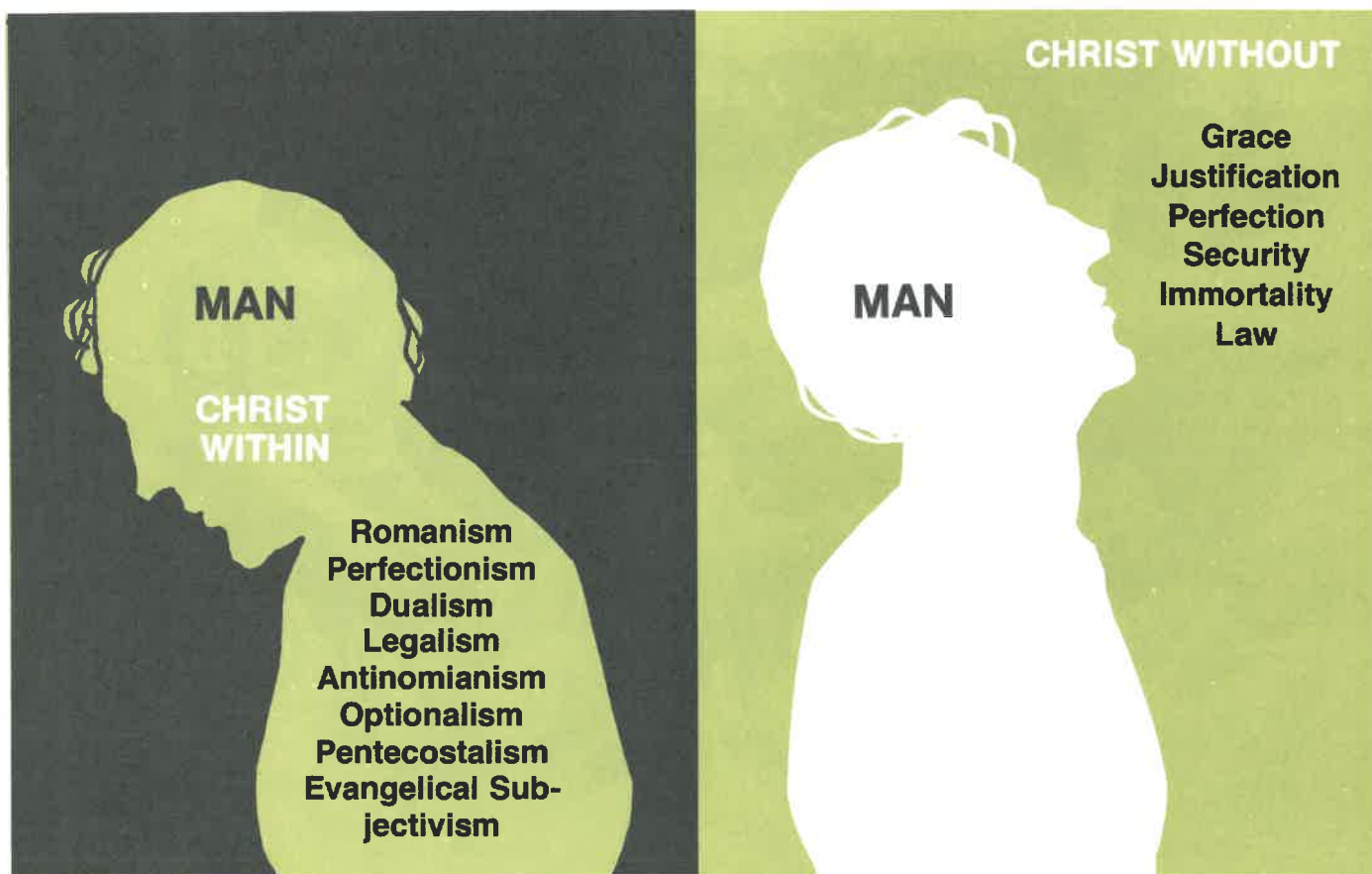
Justification means that the believing sinner,

through the righteousness of Christ, is brought into a right relationship to the law. This relationship is first legal (justification), but through the gift of the Holy Spirit it becomes vital (sanctification). The new life of grateful obedience and holiness is the beginning of eternal life. Salvation is not only salvation *from* sin, but salvation *to* holiness. While it is certain that no man is saved by holiness, it is just as certain that he is saved *to* holiness. No one is saved by the keeping of God's commandments, but all who are saved are saved *to* a new life of keeping God's commandments. It is impossible to be justified without being sanctified. He who does not possess a living, active, holy faith is not justified irrespective of who he is or what his past experience has been. Holiness is no blissful euphoria or ecstatic froth and bubble. It is a life of trustful obedience on the part of one who gratefully confesses, "Christ is Lord."

Conclusion

The popular errors which have overrun the church and which have obscured the clear light of the gospel are not so different as they may appear on the surface. As Luther remarked about the papists and the Enthusiasts, they are like Samson's foxes—their tails are tied together although their heads are pointing in different directions.

For instance, Pentecostalism and dispensational-



ism stand opposed to each other in their understanding of the age of the special gifts of the Spirit. But they have a common bond in their denial of the place which the New Testament gives to justification by faith. Pentecostalism denies that it brings the fulfillment of God's promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Dispensationalism denies that it brings the fulfillment of God's Old Testament promises to the Jews.

The heads of legalism and antinomianism may point in different directions, but their tails are tied together. We have seen that legalism is the worst form of antinomianism. Likewise, antinomianism, which puts the leading of an inward experience in the place of the objective law, must end up as the worst kind of legalism.

Each *ism* which we have examined is a radical departure from the truth of justification by faith. The biblical doctrine of justification places grace, the saving action of God, justification, perfection, security, immortality and the law outside of man. The one thing necessary in man is faith, which abides in the heart by the working of the Holy Spirit. But even this faith leads man to look outside of himself both for righteousness to stand before God and for guidance to walk before Him. The eye of faith is upon Christ in the sanctuary of heaven at God's right hand.

Beginning with Rome, we have seen that the *mark* of error is that it casts the truth down to the ground,

internalizing it within man himself. Rome internalizes saving grace and saving righteousness. Pentecostalism internalizes Christian witnessing, for it witnesses to inner experience. Evangelical subjectivism internalizes the throne room of Christ and His substantial presence. Perfectionism internalizes the Christian's completeness. Dualism internalizes immortality. Legalism internalizes the basis of acceptance with God. Antinomianism internalizes the law. Optionalism internalizes the finished work of Christ and eternal security.

This is all the spirit of man's putting himself in the place of Christ. Here is the real spirit of the man of sin, the antichrist who has cast down the place of Christ's sanctuary and "the truth to the ground" (see Dan. 8:11, 12). It is the wine of Babylon by which the enemy has confused God's people and held them in bondage. Yet the messenger who bears the everlasting gospel, or the truth of justification by faith (Rev. 14:6), is followed by another, who says, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen. . . ." Rev. 14:8. Thank God that the hosts of evil no longer have power to hold the church captive, for the gospel of Jesus Christ overthrows the strongholds of error. The sanctuary of truth, so long cast down and defiled by the errors which have been smuggled in by the man of sin, is restored to its rightful place through the pure teaching of the everlasting gospel.

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