

# Justified by Faith—Adopted in Love

## Jesus Christ - our righteousness before God and man

► **I consider everything a loss** compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. — Philippians 3:7-9

**The purpose of this lesson** is to immerse ourselves in the doctrinal and personal significance of the truth Paul lays out in these verses: how unholy people may be made right with a holy God.

**M**ARTIN Luther wrote, "If the doctrine of justification is lost, the whole of Christian doctrine is lost." In 1517, this bright young Augustinian monk shook the Christian church with his rediscovery of the foundational teaching of the Gospel—that righteousness is not something God requires of us; it is his gift to us—a gift we receive by faith.

### THE CONTEXT OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

The context of this doctrine (prepare to be deeply insulted) is our desperate need. The truth about you and me is that we are terribly imperfect, pathetically self-absorbed relationally dysfunctional beings who are hopelessly alienated from one another and the God who made us. Worse, our spiritual and moral condition is such that we are unable to make things right. Outside intervention is mandatory. Still worse, archaic and repugnant as this may sound, if our relationship with God is not restored, we are doomed to live in eternal separation from him and from all good. As to the charge that God would be unjust to sentence anyone to such a fate, C.S. Lewis has pointed out that no one will be in hell who hasn't *willed* to be there. Indeed, what could be more revolting to an unbeliever than being forced to live forever surrounded by the very holiness he or she had spurned for a lifetime? *That*, Lewis says, would be cruel and unjust punishment.

**Enter the Good News.** Given our sinful condition, we can be made right with God (justified) in only one way—by trusting in the sinless perfection of another, Jesus Christ the Righteous One. By virtue of his sinless life, atoning death and bodily resurrection, Jesus earned acceptance with God for us. Unable to be good enough, our role is to trust in Jesus goodness as our goodness. Simplistic as it sounds, when we do that, when we trust in Christ's righteousness as our righteousness, God the Righteous Judge declares us righteous. Classical Protestant theology describes this apparently scandalous transaction with a pair of Latin phrases: *sola gratia, sola fide* (through

grace alone, by faith alone). John Newton praised it in a hymn, calling it "amazing grace," which it surely is. And, as if this was not good news enough, as we shall see, Jesus, after giving us his goodness, turns round and makes *us* good. Justification by faith is the ground (root) of our holiness. But first things first.

### TWO CRITICISMS OF THIS DOCTRINE

It is patently unfair and personally insulting.



Dr. Martin Luther

**First, it is patently unfair.** The question must be put: "Does it not make a mockery of justice for one innocent to be put to death for the crimes of many guilty?" Yes. It would be unconscionable—unless, the innocent volunteered and the judge agreed. And the wonder of the Gospel is just that: The Innocent did volunteer; the Judge did agree, and we who put our faith in Christ are the grateful beneficiaries of the arrangement. Only the most malignant of minds could find such love objectionable.

**Second, it is personally insulting.** With this criticism we have already agreed. This doctrine proclaims that we are so wholly corrupt that, unless we are Divinely pursued and captured, we are not only powerless to help ourselves, we could care less.<sup>1</sup> Given this dim view of human goodness, is it any wonder that twenty-first Century moderns (who suppose there is no God who made us and no sin to be atoned for) so fiercely oppose it? In 2005, Guardian columnist Polly Toynbee took aim at the newly-released film version of C.S. Lewis' childrens classic, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, a Gospel allegory in which Aslan, the lion represents Christ.

**She wrote:** *Of all the elements of Christianity, the most repugnant is the notion of the Christ who took our sins upon himself and sacrificed his body in agony to save our souls. Did we ask him to? .... Children are supposed to fall in love with the hypnotic Aslan... He is an emblem for every-*

<sup>1</sup> See an excerpt from "The Hound of Heaven", an autobiographical poem by the English poet Francis Scott on page 3-9.

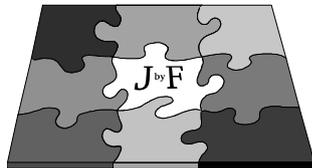
thing an atheist objects to in religion. His divine presence is a way to avoid humans taking responsibility for everything here and now on earth... Without an Aslan, there is no one here but ourselves to suffer for our sins, no one to redeem us but ourselves: we are obliged to settle our own disputes and do what we can.

We need no holy guide books, only a very human moral compass. Everyone needs ghosts, spirits, marvels and poetic imaginings, but we can do well without an Aslan."

- The Guardian, Monday 5 December 2005.

Undeniably, Christians have been guilty of some inexcusable behavior over the past two millennia, but we wonder whether MS Toynbee realises the extent to which the Gospel has restrained evil in this world, and how readily the most wicked totalitarian regimes have risen and flourished in its absence. Probably not. But we digress.

**If you have not had the joy** of studying church history and theology, please don't be put off by the technical sounding terms in this lesson. We challenge you to ground yourself in these concepts, master them and teach them to others. Our faith is not an incomprehensible jumble of unrelated doctrinal puzzle pieces floating about willy-nilly. Justification by faith is the *centrepiece* around which all the other pieces fit.



**Justification by faith is not some lofty, impractical doctrine.** It is as intensely practical as it is critically necessary. Beneath its frontal assault on our pride lies our greatest comfort—the good news that we are deeply loved.

One Sunday in London's Camden Town, we heard a young preacher with a flaming skull emblazoned on his shirt cry out, "Yes, your mother loved you when you were in her womb, but God beat her to it; he loved you before the foundation of the world!" (Eph.1:4) And, that love did not stop with mere feelings. Through the death of his Son on the cross, God dealt decisively with our sin and secured the right to transform us, his avowed enemies, into adopted daughters and sons in his family! (Rom.5:8; 2Cor.6:18)

**Martin Luther began teaching** the book of Romans at the University of Wittenburg in 1516. It was an assignment given by his mentor Johann Staupitz who hoped he would be converted through the exercise. Sure enough, as the young monk grappled with Romans 1:17, the light dawned: "For in the Gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'." This is how he describes the impact that verse had on him:

**"Night and day I pondered** until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that 'the just shall live by faith.' Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy, God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before, 'the justice of God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven..."

"The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning," he said. It's no wonder. He had discovered the missing centrepiece of the Gospel. And, as with Luther, when you and I get hold of it, the Christian faith begins to make sense. Faith, life and ministry integrate, and it's not so puzzling after all!

**It is sobering to think** that Luther, an ordained Roman Catholic priest and distinguished professor of Bible, had completely missed *the* core doctrine of the Christian faith. But, when the Spirit opened his eyes,

he embraced Christ, he said, "as my whole and sole righteousness". That is the only way any of us can be made right with God. By faith, we exchange our "filthy-rag-righteousness" for Jesus' perfect righteousness (Isa.64:6).

Luther, rather than hiding his discovery, set about sharing it with all his might. And, as he did, the Gospel began to dramatically transform the Church and indeed, all of Europe.

It is quite possible that some of us might be in the same predicament as Luther—involved up to our eyeballs in religious activity, but not trusting wholeheartedly in what he called "the gift-righteousness" of Christ. It happens. This is why Paul wrote this shocker to the Corinthian church—baptised, professing Christians all:

**Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?** - 2 Cor. 13:5,6

**Indeed, as we consider** this foundational doctrine together, would it behoove each of us to heed Paul's advice to examine ourselves to determine where our trust lies? And, if one of us should "fail the test"—what then? If you're a legalist, abandon your attempts to please God by your works. If you find you're a libertine, repent of not caring whether or not you please God. In either case, do what Luther did: receive the gift-righteousness of Jesus as your righteousness. Repent and believe this Gospel, this most amazing news of God's amazing grace.

- JWL -

## I. HOW can sinners be made righteous in the sight of a holy God?

When Luther wrote his Commentary on Paul's letter to the Galatians, he developed a new terminology to describe the two ways people pursue righteousness before God: the Law and the Gospel. He used the very helpful (if a bit complex) terms "active" and "passive" righteousness. (Keller's article pp. 3-11, 12)

**He wrote:** *In this epistle... Paul is concerned to instruct, comfort, and sustain us... in a perfect knowledge of this most excellent and Christian righteousness.... Between these two kinds of righteousness, the active righteousness of the Law and the passive righteousness of Christ, there is no middle ground. Therefore he who has strayed away from this Christian righteousness will necessarily relapse into the active righteousness; that is, when he has lost Christ, he must fall into a trust in his own works.*

— from his *Introduction to Galatians*

Let's tease out the meanings of these two kinds of righteousness.

### A. ACTIVE RIGHTEOUSNESS

**act·ive** (ak'tiv) — adj.

**DEFINITION:** In a state of action; moving; not passive.

**USAGE:** The subject initiates the action. e.g., "The striker kicks the football."



If we move away from football and think about the word "active" in terms of how we get and maintain righteousness before God, the term "active righteousness" refers to our attempts to act in ways that will earn us merit in God's sight. In other words, *I think that I must somehow do the work to produce it to make myself acceptable to God.*

### B. PASSIVE RIGHTEOUSNESS

**pas·sive** (pas'iv) — adj.

**DEFINITION:** Being subjected to an action without having initiated it.

**USAGE:** The subject is affected by the action, e.g., "The player's nose was broken by the football."



**What is "passive righteousness"?**

Passive righteousness is the righteousness we receive from God. God is the initiator. Indeed, we cannot produce righteousness; it must be imputed to us. Yes, our faith that receives this righteousness is active, but faith receives, not

produces. What's more, our faith itself is a gift—a work of the Holy Spirit. Paul calls it "a gift of God, not of works so that no one can boast" (Eph.2:1-5, 8,9; Rom.4:4,5). Luther compared our role in salvation to the ground receiving the rain. It just lies there and soaks it up! We contribute nothing, but rely on the grace of God and the merits of Christ alone. To be saved, we believe, not try.

**Through Christ**, we approach God with no need to remind him of the good things we may have done for him in the past or intend to do in the future. Rather, we go trusting that our sins, past, present and future, have been fully paid for—"nailed to the cross"—so that we are freed from their penalty.

**By faith**, we stand before an infinitely holy God with confidence (Heb.10:19ff), clothed in the sinless perfection of another—a righteousness received by faith alone. That is why we call this "passive righteousness."

## II. UNDERSTANDING the two key words: FAITH and JUSTIFICATION.

**A. WHAT IS FAITH? If you were a non-Christian hearing the Gospel, what would "believing in" or "trusting in" Jesus involve?**

### 1. Faith is an INTELLECTUAL

**activity: I believe something.** I agree with what God says about my lost condition and my need for a Saviour. I believe that Jesus is who he claimed to be, God's one and only Son. I believe that Jesus laid down his life for me, that he was my "sinless sin-bearer" and bore the full wrath of God due to me for all my sins. (Isa.53:6;1Pet.2:24)

### 2. Faith is an EMOTIONAL activity:

**I feel something.** What we believe about our being guilty before God, lost in our sins, and without hope save in the Cross of Christ, will definitely affect us emotionally. Precisely how that will look is variable. We may react with one or more of the following: **fear** (of God's judgment), **sorrow** (that we have offended a loving God), **guilt** or **shame** (over our sins), **joy** (that our conscience has been cleansed from the guilt and stain of our sins), or with **love** and **wonder** (that a holy God would actually want to adopt us into his family).

**SHARING:** Can you describe how you reacted when you first believed?

### 3. Faith is a VOLITIONAL activity:

**I do something.** Faith goes beyond mere intellectual assent (accepting factual data) or temporal faith (trusting God for health, finances, etc.). Gospel faith is *trust in Christ*. We run to Jesus with our sins and by faith lay them on him, the Lamb of God. We

transfer our trust from anything we might do to please God, and pin all our hopes on Jesus—his sinless life, his atoning death, and his bodily resurrection.

**It is important to understand that it is not our faith that saves us, but Jesus who saves us.** Do you see the difference? Paul says we are saved by grace, *through* faith, not *by* faith (Eph.2:8,9). Faith is the empty hand with which we receive God's free gift of salvation.

**B. WHAT IS JUSTIFICATION? To be justified is to be declared righteous.** Two historic creeds:

**The Thirty-Nine Articles (Church of England)**

**Article XI: Of the Justification of Man**

We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings...

**The London Confession of 1689** (being the Philadelphia Confession of Faith of 1742 - Baptist)

**Chapter IX "OF JUSTIFICATION"**

**Those whom God effectually calls**, he also freely justifies, not by *infusing* righteousness into them [contra Thomas Aquinas] but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting them as righteous, not for anything produced in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; not by *imputing* faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them as their righteousness; but by imputing Christ's obedience unto the whole law, and his obedience through his death for their whole and sole righteousness, they do receive and rest on him and his righteousness by faith, which they have not of themselves; it is the gift of God.... Faith thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is alone the instrument of justification."

(Eph.1:7; 2Cor.5:19,21; Rom. 3:22-25; 4:5-8; 5:1,17-19; Acts 10:43; Gal.2:16; Phil.3:9)

Strictly speaking, then, *justification* refers only to the judicial act: **God declares us righteous for the sake of Christ.** But, wonderfully, much more is going on than meets the eye. A great exchange is taking place on earth and in heaven—quite literally, a *double transaction*.

### III. VISUALISING the great exchange - our sin for Christ's righteousness

*Saying "Jesus died for our sins" is only half the Gospel!*

#### "Double-Imputation" – Justification's Double Blessing

*We are Declared "Not guilty!"*

**1** BY FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST, my sin is *imputed* (credited) to his account. The sinless One was made to be sin for me, (substitution). The full wrath of God due to me for my sins was poured out on him (propitiation).

**RESULT:** God declares me, the guilty person, "not guilty!"

**2 Corinthians 5:21a** - "God made him who knew no sin to be made sin for us..."

**But being acquitted is only half the Gospel!**

*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one into his own way, but the Lord has laid on Him, the iniquity of us all. — Isa. 53:6*

**Martin Luther (1535)** "Through faith in Christ, therefore, Christ's righteousness becomes our righteousness, and all that He has becomes ours; rather He Himself becomes ours."

*We are Declared Righteous!*

**2** BY FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST, His righteousness is *imputed* to me, that is, credited to my account so that His righteousness becomes my righteousness.

**RESULT:** God declares me, the truly unrighteous person, "forever righteous" in his sight!

**2 Corinthians 5:21b**  
"...so that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

*I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.*

— Philippians 3:9

**John Calvin (1555)** "A man will be justified by faith when, excluded from righteousness of works, by faith, he lays hold of the righteousness of Christ, and, **clothed in it**, appears in the sight of God not as a sinner, but as righteous."

#### IV. "Clothed in Christ" - a mini-drama <sup>1</sup> illustrating justification and adoption

As a backdrop, consider Jesus' encounter with a Pharisee (Matt.22:34-40) in which he reveals the true nature of the law. This skit illustrates the **LEGAL** result of justification (we are declared righteous), and, the **FAMILIAL** result of justification (we are adopted into God's family). See Rom.13:14 and Gal.3:27 for Paul's use of "clothed in Christ."

**Note:** The three major benefits of the Gospel in our present life are: **justification, adoption, and sanctification** (growth). We begin studying sanctification in Lesson 4.



Justification is a *forensic* idea conceived in terms of law... adoption is a *family* idea conceived in terms of love... (p.186, emphasis Packer's)

In 1742, a newly-converted Charles Wesley celebrated the joy of his sonship in the hymn, "Arise, My Soul, Arise!" (See page 1-5.)

Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote: "The presence of the Holy Spirit within us reminds us of our sonship—yes, our adult sonship—the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, "ABBA, Father!" That is our relationship to God, and the moment we realize it, it transforms everything."

**QUESTION:** On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being high), how would you rate your understanding and appreciation of your status as God's adopted daughter or son?

#### V. ADOPTION into God's family is the highest privilege the Gospel offers

The thought of God adopting us filled John with a sense of wonder. "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us," he wrote, "that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are!" - 1John 3:1

Because we are God's children, we can address the Creator of the universe using the same title Jesus used in Mark 14:36, "Abba, Father", i.e., "DADDY, FATHER!" (Gal.4:4-7; Rom.8:15).

J.I Packer wrote in *Knowing God*: "Were I asked to focus the New Testament message in three words, my proposal would be adoption through propitiation." (p.194)

And, he says, "If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all... 'Father' is the Christian name for God." (p.182)

Pressing the point further he adds, Adoption is the highest privilege that the gospel offers: higher even than justification. This may cause raising of eyebrows, for justification is the gift of God on which, since Luther, Evangelicals have laid the greatest stress. We are accustomed to say, almost without thinking, that free justification is God's supreme blessing to us sinners. None the less, careful thought will show the truth of the statement we have just made... Justification is the primary and fundamental blessing... but this is not to say justification is the highest blessing of the gospel. Adoption is higher because of the richer relationship with God that it involves.

It is  
**DIFFICULT**  
to conceive of a  
**JUDGE**  
who would  
knowingly  
**ACQUIT**  
a guilty person,  
but quite  
**IMPOSSIBLE**  
to imagine  
he would  
turn round and  
**ADOPT**  
that person  
as his  
child.

**NOTE:** Many Christians struggle with the assurance that they truly belong to God. See the addendum on the 3-6,7 to get help with this.



#### GRACE ASSIGNMENTS

1. **MEMORISE** Galatians 4:4-7
2. **WRITE OUT** a brief, clear definition of justification by faith.
3. **SHARE** the truth of "double imputation" with someone before our next session.
4. **CHECK** your "JQ" using the "Justification Quiz" on page 3-8.

5. In preparation for our next session, READ the article by J.I. Packer, "The Context of Holiness is Justification by Jesus Christ" on page 4-6. Packer ties together lessons 3 and 4, showing that justification is the foundation (ground) of our sanctification.

6. **REJOICE!** You are worse than you think, but, the grace of God is bigger than you had ever imagined possible! **REJOICE**, because Jesus not only died for you, he lives for you! He is on duty 24-7-365 as your Great High Priest (Heb.7:25). **REJOICE** that at this very moment, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, interceding for you, clothing you in his righteousness, making you beautiful to His Father. **REJOICE** that you are God's beloved and precious child, now and forever. **REJOICE!**



<sup>1</sup> Instructions for this skit can be found in Appendix D-1 of your manual.

## ADDENDUM: WHAT THE BIBLE HAS TO SAY ABOUT ASSURANCE

(the Holy Spirit's witness in our hearts that we do indeed belong to God - forever)

*The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ...* — Rom.8:16

Since the days of the apostles, one of the burning questions that has haunted believers is, "If I have truly trusted in Jesus, can I lose my salvation? Can I be saved today but lost tomorrow?"

In answer, the majority of Christian denominations answer emphatically, "NO!" You most certainly cannot be saved today and lost tomorrow. Others answer with a resounding "Yes! Yes, you most definitely can be saved today and lost tomorrow!" Which is correct?

**A. Those who believe we can lose our salvation do so for two rather understandable reasons:** 1. What some verses in the Bible seem to imply, and, 2. personal observation.

**1. Hebrews 6:4-6 seems to teach that a true believer can "fall from grace".**

*"It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace."*

**2. Many of us have observed** people who professed faith in Jesus, are baptised, and become involved (sometimes deeply) in the ministry of the church. But at some point, they turn their backs on Christ and deny the Gospel. They "fall away."

**B. What do we have to say in answer to this? Several things.**

**1. In the first instance,** we need to see that Hebrews 6 sets forth a hypothetical case. In verse 9 the writer says, "Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case— things that accompany salvation." In other words, if you fall away, it will be permanent, but, I'm confident this is not going to happen.

**And, it is a matter of interpretation** what "tasted of the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit and tasted the goodness of the word of God" refer to. **If** the writer is referring to the

the new birth experience, yes, we could be saved and lost (born and unborn) in one day. **If**, on the other hand, he is referring to people who are merely belongers but not regenerated, not born again by the Spirit, not recipients of a new heart, not sealed by the Holy Spirit, then there is no application whatsoever for those who are genuine children of God.

**2. In the second instance, that of personal experience.** Most of us have known someone who appeared to have a credible profession of faith, appeared to be genuinely converted (some have been pastors, elders, and Bible teachers) but who have fallen away from the church and never returned. *What of them?*

**Here we need to remember that** people can deceive them- selves (and others) about their spiritual condition. People can be motivated to do church work for all sorts of reasons, so it is no guarantee they are **regenerated** (born again), only that they have **professed** faith in Christ. Making professions is something we do; the new birth is something only God can do. In Jesus' own description of what will happen on the Day of Judgment, he will say to many who boast in their work in the kingdom, "Depart from me, I never knew you" (Matt.7:23). The great evangelist Billy Graham once remarked, "**The problem in the church today is that too many people are being fed who have not been born yet.**" What did he mean by that? He was referring to the fact that you can be "in" but not "of."

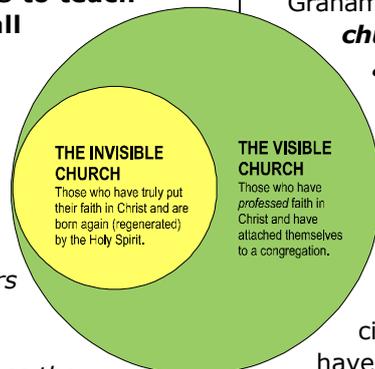
### THE VISIBLE & INVISIBLE CHURCH

The "**visible church**" (the large circle) is comprised of all those who have made some sort of public profession of faith in Christ. The "**invisible church**" (the smaller circle) is comprised of all those who have been born of God's Spirit, those who have been given new hearts and sealed with the promise of the Spirit. Jesus refers to these as "my sheep" (Jn.10:27).

**I John 2:19 clearly illustrates this:**

*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.* (KJV)

**Faulty evangelism can fill our churches with people** who are members of the visible, but not the invisible church. For example, the message "Do you want peace, joy and fulfillment in your life? Do you want financial security? Ask Jesus into your life/heart, and God will give you what you need." is a common "gospel" we hear today. But it is not the Gospel. There is no information about the



nature of sin, hell, judgment, the Cross, the wrath of God, justification, faith, or atonement. A man-centred gospel will elicit a man-centred response.

**3. The teaching that we can be saved today and lost tomorrow is based on a man-centred view of how we are saved.** It flows from two unbiblical assumptions:

**a]** that our acceptance with God is based on our ability to keep the law—i.e., “active righteousness.” *If God’s love for us is conditional (based on perfect obedience), we can never rest in his love unless we can be perfect, and...*

**b]** the idea that if we keep the law *outwardly*, we are “sinless” and thereby “saved.” This completely ignores what the law requires: perfect love for God and others. (Lesson 2) If we could save ourselves by keeping the law, a God who sacrificed his Son to accomplish what we could do for ourselves would be a cosmic buffoon, not the all-wise God of the Bible.

**C. Finally, the Scriptures settle the question of assurance once for all.** As we read the words of Jesus, Peter and Paul, ask yourself, “*Who is in charge here, God, or me?*” We think you will be wonderfully comforted and assured.

**Jesus:** *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup>I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup>My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.*

— **John 10:27-29** [Who is in charge here?]

**Peter:** *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. — I Peter 1:3-5*

**Paul:** *I am confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. — Philippians 1:6*

**“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God**

† **NOTE:** Our God is a good daddy! He “seals” his adopted sons and daughters both *outwardly* and *inwardly*. Water baptism is the Abba-Father’s seal *on* us. The Holy Spirit is God’s seal *in* us.

*foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?*

*He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor*

*anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

— **Romans 8:28-39**

**And you also** were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.

*Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal,† the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession— to the praise of his glory. —*

**Ephesians 1:13-14**

**YES, the Bible teaches** that I am responsible to *persevere* in the faith, but God promises that he will *preserve* me in the faith. God finishes what he starts—*every time!*

**Contrary to what some may think,** when we speak of “the assurance of salvation,” we are not presuming that we have the strength to hold onto Christ. What we have is a confident assurance that Christ will hold onto us. The gracious God who brought us from death to life, cleansed us by his blood of his Son, adopted us into his family, sealed and filled us with his Holy Spirit, is a good and faithful Father who will do what he said—keep us in his grace and love until we see our Saviour’s face.



## For Fun: Test your understanding of J by F Alone with a little quiz.

Put on your Thinking Cap. In this quiz, we will need to discern the difference between justification (being declared righteous) and sanctification (behaving righteously).

Circle which you think is *the most accurate statement, A or B.*

- A. Justification is a single act of God on our behalf, or...

B. Justification is an ongoing work of God in us.
- A. Justification determines my relationship with God from beginning to end, or...

B. Justification is only for the beginning of my Christian life.
- A. Justification is God changing me to be righteous, or...

B. Justification is God declaring me to be righteous.
- A. Faith alone justifies us by uniting us to Christ, or...

B. Faith together with baptism justifies us by uniting us to Christ.
- A. The basis for our justification is Jesus' love, or...

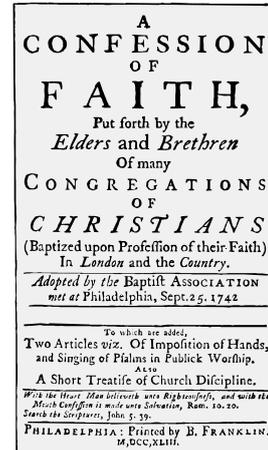
B. The basis for our justification is Jesus' righteousness.
- A. Faith in Jesus + Our Good Works = Salvation, or..

B. Faith in Jesus + 0 = Salvation + Good Works
- A. Justification involves no human effort, but sanctification requires our cooperation with the Holy Spirit, or...

B. Neither justification nor sanctification involve any effort on our part.
- A. Faith in the righteousness of Jesus makes me holy, or...

B. Trying to keep the law makes me holy.
- A. Justification frees us from our responsibility to keep the Ten Commandments, or...

B. Justification enables us to keep the Ten Commandments in the new way of the Spirit.



Adapted from *SONSHIP* ©1989 World Harvest Mission USA

*"My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus' blood and righteousness.  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name.  
On Christ, the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand."*

by Edward Mote, 1834

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Answers to the Justification Quiz: 1. A 2. A 3. B 4. A 5. B 6. B 7. A 8. A 9. B

# The Hound of Heaven

by Francis Thompson, 1859-1907

*an autobiographical poem composed circa 1889 during a period of drug rehabilitation † at Norbertine monastery, Storrington*



**I fled Him down the nights** and down the days  
I fled Him down the arches of the years  
I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind, and in the midst of tears  
I hid from him, and under running laughter.  
Up vistaed hopes I sped and shot precipitated  
Adown titanic glooms of chasmed fears  
From those strong feet that followed, followed after  
But with unhurrying chase and unperturbed pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,  
They beat, and a Voice beat,  
More instant than the feet:  
All things betray thee who betrayest me.

**I pleaded, outlaw-wise** by many a hearted casement,  
curtained red, trellised with inter-twining charities,  
For though I knew His love who followed,  
Yet was I sore adread, lest having Him,  
I should have nought beside.  
But if one little casement parted wide,  
The gust of his approach would clash it to.  
Fear wist not to evade as Love wist to pursue.  
Across the margent of the world I fled,  
And troubled the gold gateways of the stars,  
Smiting for shelter on their clanged bars,  
Fretted to dulcet jars and silvern chatter  
The pale ports of the moon...

[ For the remainder of this 182 line poem with a key word glossary  
see: <http://poetry.elcore.net/HoundOfHeavenInRtTGlossed.html> ]

† Throughout his life, Thompson battled addiction to the fashionable Victorian opiate Laudanum. Many literary and artistic figures including Coleridge, Poe, Percy Bysshe Shelly, Keats and Dickens are known to have used the drug. See: <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Laudanum>

# Before the Throne of God Above

**by Charitie Lees Smith Bancroft**

Charitie was born June 21, 1841 at Bloomfield, County Dublin, Ireland. The daughter of Rev. Sidney Smith, Rector of Drumragh, County Tyrone, Ireland, she married Arthur E. Bancroft in 1869. Her hymns appeared in *Lyra Britannica*, Bishop Ryle's *Spiritual Songs*, in other collections, and as leaflets. Widowed twice, she died in 1923 and is buried as Charitie de Cheney in Mountain View Cemetery, Oakland, California.

We know little else of her life, but through this powerful hymn she left us the greatest of all legacies: Charitie trusted in the righteousness of Jesus *as her righteousness*.

## **Before the throne of God above**

I have a strong and perfect plea.  
A great high Priest whose Name is Love  
Who ever lives and pleads for me.  
**My name is graven on His hands,**  
My name is written on His heart.  
I know that while in Heaven He stands  
No tongue can bid me thence depart.  
No tongue can bid me thence depart.

## **When Satan tempts me to despair**

And tells me of the guilt within,  
Upward I look and see Him there  
Who made an end to all my sin.

## **Because the sinless Savior died**

My sinful soul is counted free.  
For God the just is satisfied  
To look on Him and pardon me.  
To look on Him and pardon me.

## **Behold Him there the risen Lamb,**

My perfect spotless righteousness,  
The great unchangeable I AM,  
The King of glory and of grace,

## **One in Himself I cannot die.**

My soul is purchased by His blood,  
My life is hid with Christ on high,  
With Christ my Savior and my God!  
With Christ my Savior and my God!



**MUSIC:** Search [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) for - Before the Throne of God Above  
The group SELAH has an excellent arrangement. Collapse the window  
if you are offended by images of Jesus.

*Grace4Life* - by John Wade Long, Jr. - 2010 - London UK - [www.grace4life.org](http://www.grace4life.org)

# Passive Righteousness

**Martin Luther: Passive Righteousness** - An abridgement by Dr. Timothy Keller - 30 January 2008

Martin Luther's teaching on receiving the righteousness of Christ by faith alone is the foundation of vital Christian living. It underpinned the Great Reformation, the revival's of John Wesley and George Whitefield, and the subsequent revivals in America. Our churches will only be as strong as our commitment to this doctrine of Justification by Faith.

## 1. The most important thing in the world

The one doctrine which I have supremely in my heart is that of faith in Christ, from whom, through whom and unto whom all my theological thinking flows back and forth, day and night. This rock, which we call the doctrine of justification through faith, was shaken by Satan in paradise when he persuaded our first parents that they might by their own wisdom and power become like God. Ever since then the whole world has invented innumerable religions and ways through which, without the aid of Christ, use their works to redeem themselves from evil and sins.

When Paul discusses the biblical doctrine of justification by faith he explains that there are several kinds of 'righteousness.' First, there is political or civil righteousness—the nation's public laws—which magistrates and lawyers may defend and teach. Second, there is cultural righteousness—the standards of our family and social grouping or class—which parents and schools may teach. Third, there is ethical righteousness—the Ten Commandments and law of God—which the church may teach but only in light of Christian righteousness. So all these may be received without danger, as long as we attribute to them no power to satisfy for sin, to please God, or to deserve grace....These kinds of righteousness are gifts of God, like all good things we enjoy.

Yet there is another righteousness, far above the others, which Paul calls "the righteousness of faith"—Christian righteousness. God imputes it to us apart from our works—in other words, it is passive righteousness, as the others are active. For we do nothing for it, and we give nothing for it. We only receive it.

## 2. The need for Christian righteousness

This "passive" righteousness is a mystery that the world cannot understand. Indeed, Christians never completely understand it themselves, and thus do not take advantage of it when they are troubled and tempted. So we have to constantly teach it, repeat it, and work it out in practice. Anyone who does not understand this righteousness or cherish it in the heart and conscience will contin-

ually be buffeted by fears and depression. Nothing gives peace like this passive righteousness. For human beings by nature, when they get near either danger or death itself, will of necessity examine their own worthiness. We defend ourselves before all threats by recounting our good deeds and moral efforts. But then the remembrance of sins and flaws inevitably comes to mind, and this tears us apart, and we think, "How many errors and sins and wrongs I have done! Please God, let me live so I can fix and amend them." We become obsessed with our active righteousness and are terrified

by its imperfections. But the real evil is that we trust our own power to be righteous and will not lift up our eyes to see what Christ has done for us.... So the troubled conscience has no cure for its desperation and feeling of unworthiness unless it takes hold of the forgiveness of sins by grace, offered free of charge in Jesus Christ, which is this passive or Christian righteousness.... If I tried to fulfill the law myself, I could

not trust in what I had accomplished, neither could it stand up to the judgment of God. So... I rest only upon the righteousness of Christ ...which I do not produce but receive, God the Father freely giving it to us through Jesus Christ.

## 3. Law and grace

It is an absolute and unique teaching in all the world, to teach people, through Christ, to live as if there were no law or wrath or punishment. In a sense, they do not exist any longer for the Christian, but only total grace and mercy for Christ's sake. Once you are in Christ, the law is the greatest guide for your life, but until you have Christian righteousness, all the law can do is show you how sinful and condemned you are. In fact, to those outside of Christian righteousness, the law needs to be expounded in all its force. Why? So that people who think they have power to be righteous before God will be humbled by the law and understand they are sinners.

Therefore we must be careful to use the law appropriately. If we used the law in order to be



Luther in disguise as "Junker Jörg" - 1522

accepted by God through obedience, then Christian righteousness becomes mixed up with earned/moral righteousness in our minds. If we try to earn our righteousness by doing many good deeds, we actually do nothing. We neither please God through our works-righteousness nor do we honor the purpose for which the law was given. But if we first receive Christian righteousness, then we can use the law, not for our salvation, but for his honor and glory, and to lovingly show our gratitude.

So then, have we nothing to do to obtain this righteousness? No, nothing at all! For this righteousness comes by doing nothing, hearing nothing, knowing nothing, but rather in knowing and believing this only—that Christ has gone to the right hand of the Father, not to become our judge, but to become for us our wisdom, our righteousness, our holiness, our salvation! Now God sees no sin in us, for in this heavenly righteousness sin has no place. So now we may certainly think, “Although I still sin, I don’t despair, because Christ lives, who is both my righteousness and my eternal life.” In that righteousness I have no sin, no fear, no guilty conscience, no fear of death. I am indeed a sinner in this life of mine and in my own righteousness, but I have another life, another righteousness above this life, which is in Christ, the Son of God, who knows no sin or death, but is eternal righteousness and eternal life.



#### 4. Living the gospel

While we live here on earth, we will be accused, exercised with temptations, oppressed with heaviness and sorrow, and bruised by the law with its demands of active righteousness. Because of this, Paul sets out in this letter of Galatians to teach us, to comfort us, and to keep us constantly aware of this Christian righteousness. For if the truth of being justified by Christ alone (not by our works) is lost, then all Christian truths are lost. For there is no middle ground between Christian righteousness and works-righteousness. There is no other alternative to Christian righteousness but works-righteousness; if you do not build your confidence on the work of Christ, you must build your confidence on your own work. On this truth and only on this truth the church is built and has its being.

This distinction is easy to utter in words, but in use and experience it is very hard. So I challenge you to exercise yourselves continually in these matters through study, reading,

meditation on the Word and prayer, so that in the time of trial you will be able to both inform and comfort both your consciences and others, to bring them from law to grace, from active/works-righteousness to passive/Christ’s righteousness. In times of struggle, the devil will seek to terrify us by using against us our past record and the wrath and law of God. So if we cannot see the differences between the two kinds of righteousness, and if we do not take hold of Christ by faith, sitting at the right hand of God (Heb.7:25) and pleading our case as sinners to the Father, then we are under the law, not under grace. Christ is no savior, but a lawgiver, and no longer our salvation, but an eternal despair.

So learn to ‘speak the gospel’ to one’s heart. For example, when the law creeps into your conscience, learn to be a cunning logician—learn to use arguments of the gospel against it. Say: *O law! You would climb up into the kingdom of my conscience, and there reign and condemn me for sin, and would take from me the joy of my heart which I have by faith in Christ, and drive me to desperation, that I might be without hope. You have overstepped*

*your bounds. Know your place! You are a guide for my behavior, but you are not Savior and Lord of my heart. For I am baptized, and through the gospel am called to receive righteousness and eternal life.... So trouble me not! For I will not allow you, so intolerable a tyrant and tormentor, to reign in my heart and conscience—for they are the seat and temple of Christ the Son of God, who is the king of righteousness and peace, and my most sweet savior and mediator. He shall keep my conscience joyful and quiet in the sound and pure doctrine of the gospel, through the knowledge of this passive and heavenly righteousness.*

When we are assured of this righteousness, we not only cheerfully work well in our vocations, but we submit to all manner of burdens and dangers in this present life, because we know that this is the will of God, and that this obedience pleases him. This then is the argument of this Epistle, which Paul expounds against the false teachers who had darkened the Galatians’ understanding of this righteousness by faith.



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Photo by J.W. Long 25Dec08. The half-timbered section of Wartburg Castle in Eisenach, Germany where Luther hid from the Pope’s spies. Disguised as “Junker Jörg”, he translated the NT into German in just 10 weeks.