

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH – CHAPTER 11

“Justification” – Part 3 of 4*

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2. Faith—receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness—is the only instrument of justification;^d yet it is not the only grace in the person justified, but is always accompanied by all other saving graces. Justifying faith is not dead, but works by love.^e d. John 3:18, 36; Rom. 3:28; 5:1 e. James 2:17, 22, 26; Gal. 5:6

Section 2 – “In the previous section, we examined the difference between the *imputation* of the righteousness of Christ” [to credit], “which is the Reformed view, and the *infusion* of the righteousness of Christ” [to permeate], “which is the Roman Catholic view.” Let’s read the first portion of the Section 2 statement above, ‘Faith—receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness—is the only instrument of justification.’ Let’s spend some time on this affirmation.

“The Reformation doctrine of justification is frequently summed up in the slogan *sola fide*, which means ‘by faith alone.’ The phrase *sola fide* stands for the teaching that justification is by faith alone.

The Roman Catholic Church, historically, also taught that justification is by faith. They say that faith is the initial stage of justification. It is the foundation and root of our justification.

Rome insists on the necessity of faith for justification. So the *fide* in *sola fide* is clearly affirmed by Rome. What is not affirmed by Rome is the *sola*, because even though faith is the initiation, the foundation, and the root of justification, its mere presence is not enough to effect” [cause] “justification. There must be something besides faith in order for us to be justified—a necessary condition. A necessary condition is something that must be present in order for an effect or consequence to follow, but its presence does not guarantee the result.

For example, under normal circumstances, a necessary condition for fire is the presence of oxygen. But, fortunately for us, the mere presence of oxygen is not enough to cause fire. If it were, we would catch on fire every time we took a breath of air. So we must distinguish between a *necessary* condition and a *sufficient* condition. A sufficient condition absolutely guarantees that the result will follow.

Given that distinction, we can see the difference between” the two church views “of the relationship between faith and justification. In the Roman view, faith is a necessary condition for justification, not a sufficient condition for it. In the Protestant view, faith is not only a necessary condition but also a sufficient condition for justification. That is, when we put our faith and trust in Christ, God will most surely declare us justified in His sight. The Reformation view, which is the biblical view, is that if faith is present, justification is inevitably present as well.

What is unthinkable in the Reformation view is that we could have faith without justification.” Rome says “we can keep our faith but commit a mortal sin that will destroy the grace of justification, so that we will be damned (without proper penance). But for the Reformers, the mere possession of genuine faith is all that is required in order for us to receive the grace and maintain the state of justification.”

“When the Reformers said that justification is by faith or through faith, they affirmed that the means or instrument by which we are justified is faith and faith alone. The only instrument that we need, the only tool required to move us from a state of damnation to a state of justification is faith, but faith is not the only thing we need in order to be justified. We also need Christ in order to be justified. That is, in order to be justified, we need His perfect righteousness and His atonement on the cross. Everything that is required by God to meet His standard of righteousness and justice has been fulfilled

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objectively in and through the work of Christ. He has done it all. The whole Roman Catholic-Protestant debate on justification is not over the objective work of Christ so much as it is over how we receive the benefits of His work.” Reformers answer according to the teaching of Paul, “by and through, faith alone. But it is not faith alone that saves us. When we say that justification is by faith alone, we are saying that justification is by and through our faith in Christ alone.

The instrumental cause of justification, according to Rome”, is through the sacraments of baptism and penance. The difference is between salvation that is accomplished through the church’s administration of the sacraments “and salvation that is experienced through faith in the completed work of Christ alone. This is all the difference in the world.” “We are justified not by faith plus works but by faith alone. All that is needed to enter the kingdom of God is faith or trust in the work of Christ alone.”

“The only one who can save us is Christ, and the only way we can get access to Him is through faith. We do not rest on anything else in our lives except Christ and His righteousness for our salvation.”

Most evangelical Christians [those in agreement with the gospel message] “will say that God, from the beginning, looked down the corridors of time from all eternity and saw which people, when they heard the offer of the gospel, would say yes and which would say no. God then elected those whom he knew ahead of time would say yes but did not elect those whom he knew ahead of time would say no. In this view, it is up to each person to decide whether to believe and be justified.

Now let’s ask this question: Can we believe that last statement and at the same time believe that faith is a gift? No, because we would have to say that God knows from all eternity—and he does—to whom He will give that gift, and on that basis elects them. That is a reversal of the order. People are elected to receive the gift because He is the giver. If God’s gift were dependent upon anything that we did, it would not be gratuitous and we would have something about which to boast. But the Apostle Paul insists that we have nothing about which to boast. He taught sola fide and sola gratia. We are saved by grace through faith. ‘For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God’ (Eph. 2:8). When Paul is finished, he banishes works altogether. Reformed theology is the only theology that consistently holds to that.”

*Look for Part 4 of 4 in the September newsletter.