

DAILY DOSE OF DOCTRINE

May 5-9, 2008



May 5, 2008 **Justification by Faith**

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.”¹

The Bible states that we are justified “by” or “through” faith. This does not mean that it is our faith that merits our forgiveness. Rather “faith is the instrument by which we appropriate Christ and his righteousness”². God offers us forgiveness as a free gift, based upon Christ’s atoning death on the cross. Faith is simply the hand that reaches out to receive that gracious present.

Martin Luther, John Calvin and others struggled with the idea that free will might have a role in this faith decision because we might see that choice as a ‘good work’ and so feel that in some way we had ‘earned’ our salvation. However the Bible simply asserts that even faith is a gift of God, therefore there is no ground for boasting.³

Imagine that someone inherits ten million dollars from a long-lost relative. All they have to do to receive it is sign a few papers. Even the limo to the bank is provided for them! Would they have the audacity to claim that they had ‘earned’ their great wealth by the ‘hard labour’ of writing their name six or seven times?!!

Even if we have some small role in the act of receiving God’s gift of salvation, it is truly negligible in the context of God’s glorious gifts of justification and saving faith. Rather than boast, we can only praise!

¹ Romans 3:23-25 (TNIV)

² L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p. 520

³ Ephesians 2:8-9

May 6, 2008

Effectual Calling

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”¹

Effectual calling is a label sometimes applied to the work of the Holy Spirit, externally and internally, to bring us to Christ. Externally, he leads others to share the gospel with us through various means. Internally, he helps us to understand that message and feel the need to move toward God. So, the Word is *“savingly applied by the operation of the Holy Spirit”* and it is *“effectual unto salvation”²*

This does not mean that a person is compelled by God to believe. While the Word sometimes goes out in a creative manner, forcing change, as in the creation of the world or in imparting the new birth, this is not what we mean here. In conversion, the Spirit uses the Word in a “morally persuasive”³ way, addressing our minds and hearts and wills. He addresses our conscious understanding with insight as well as our sub-conscious thoughts, motives, emotions, etc. His goal is to persuade us to accept God’s gift of salvation and have us move into eternal fellowship with him.

In a way, the role of the Spirit is to be a good salesperson, using every means possible to help us make a choice which, in this case, is genuinely the right one. While God’s calling is therefore very ‘effective’, the response is still up to us. We can harden our hearts and resist God’s work in our lives or we can open ourselves up to Him and experience his grace.

¹ 1 Peter 2:9 (TNIV)

² L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p. 469.

³ Berkhof, p. 470.

May 7, 2008 **The Point of ‘Effectual Calling’**

“but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”¹

Teachings like effectual calling sometimes come under fire because it is alleged they deny the need for a human response to God and they are hard to explain. Why talk about this at all?

Having some understanding of this teaching has a number of benefits. First, it glorifies God by emphasizing his sovereignty and the magnitude of his work in bringing us to himself. The Father sends out countless appeals to us to come back to Him and the Son suffered and died to atone for our sins, but the work did not end there. God does not just leave it up to us. The Holy Spirit powerfully strives to call us to respond. The love and grace of God is magnified as we understand all that he does for us.

Secondly, it takes away the excuses of sinners. At the Judgment, as God reveals all that he did to strive with us, every objection will be silenced.

Thirdly, it provides us with encouragement to pray for those who have not yet responded to Christ. While God does not force anyone to accept him, neither is he stymied by indifference or ignorance. By many means, the Spirit is able to bring home the truth to the ‘sheep’ who are still wandering. We can therefore pray with hope and faith for God to strategically work in their minds and hearts.

¹ 1 Corinthians 1:23-24 (TNIV)

May 8, 2008

Faith

“know that a person is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.”¹

In Scripture, faith is not so much a matter of intellectual assent as it is a matter of confident reliance. It is a relying or leaning upon God because he is known and his testimony is believed. In the New Testament, faith “in Christ” signifies a transference of trust from ourselves to our Lord or a self-surrender to God. Several figurative expressions are used to help broaden our understanding:

- “Looking to Jesus”...stresses that faith is an act of the intellect ‘perceiving’, the will fixing its eye on the object of faith and the heart finding peace and satisfaction as a result.
- “Hungering and thirsting” intimates that something is lacking and that Christ as object of faith will bring satisfaction and contentment. There is a sense of urgency, anticipation and assurance.
- “Coming to Christ”: signifies that faith looks away from oneself and fixes confidence and hope upon Christ God.
- “Receiving Christ” testifies to faith as the means by which we appropriate the blessings of God. It is the hand that receives God’s gifts.

Biblical faith is more than just assent to spiritual truth. It denotes relationship, “a hearty trust which the Holy Ghost works in me by the gospel”.²

¹ Galatians 2:16 (TNIV)

² Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 21

May 9, 2008

Regeneration

“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.”¹

While conversion is an interactive affair, involving repentance and faith on our part, regeneration or ‘new birth’ in Christ is entirely the work of God.

When we respond to God’s grace with saving faith, we experience not only a change in our status before God (justification), we also receive new spiritual life within. The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in the life of the new believer, testifying (as we saw in relationship to our adoption) to the fact that we really are children of God and assuring us of our salvation. But he does much more than that.

The Spirit also gives us a new ‘heart’ and a new spiritual ‘nature’. Instead of a heart that solely loves self and pursues its own desires, we are given the beginning of a new love for God and a longing to live in fellowship with him and in obedience to his will. Instead of a fallen nature, with very limited ability to avoid temptation or no ability to live a godly life, we are given a new nature that can resist evil and can be empowered to pursue a Christ-like life.

The good news is that the person who is ‘born again’ possesses the ‘DNA of God’ with the Spirit dwelling within. We truly have a new beginning and a powerful new hope for transformation. However, we must keep in mind that our old natures are not dead yet. Ultimate victory over those old sins, attitudes, affections and habits is assured, but the struggle between old and new can be intense and/or prolonged.

¹ 1 Peter 1:3 (TNIV)