

# Landon Sharp Debate on Justification

## Affirmative

### Keith Sharp

This, the seventh debate between my friend David Landon and me, is on the vital and practical subject of justification. I affirm, **The Scriptures teach that justification before God is by the obedience of faith.**

## Definition of Proposition

The "Scriptures" are the 66 books of the Bible. To "teach" is to impart knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. "Justification" is "*vindication, acquittal*." (Arndt & Gingrich. 197) This involves our standing "before God" rather than man. "By" indicates the means through which it is accomplished. "The obedience of faith" (Romans 1:5; 16:26) can indicate either doing as directed because of faith in the heart or doing what the faith, the gospel (Galatians 1:11,23), directs. Which it means is unimportant, for, in practicality, they are the same. Justification is the legal term for salvation (James 2:14,21,23-25).

## Explanation of Issue

The issue is not justification by faith as opposed to justification by works. Rather, it is justification by faith **alone** versus justification by **obedience which arises from faith**. It is not faith versus works but **faith alone** in opposition to **working faith**. I believe and teach every passage which teaches justification by grace and by faith.

## The Principle of Justification by Faith

Though in different ages God has required varying things for righteousness, the principle of justification by faith has been the same in every age. Noah is the perfect example.

*By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. (Hebrews 11:7)*

God spoke to Noah, warning him of destruction and commanding him what to do. Noah believed the Lord. This faith led him to obey. Thus, he "became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith." That is, he was justified before God. The order was and is: **God speaks, man believes, man obeys, and God justifies**. The Lord hasn't commanded us to build an ark, but we must hear, believe, and obey His Son. Only then will He justify us.

## The Necessity of Obedience

We cannot be right before God, i.e., justified, apart from obedience to the Lord. The theme of the Sermon on the Mount is the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:17-20). As He concluded His marvelous sermon, the Master declared, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." (Matthew 7:21) It is a hypocritical waste of time to confess Jesus as Lord but fail to obey Him (Matthew 7:22-23; cf. Luke 6:46). Jesus then taught, "whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock." (verse 24) This one will be saved in the storm of judgment (verse 25). But He warned, "everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand." (verse 27) He will perish in judgment (verse 27).

"Those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ ... shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord..." (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9)

Christ "became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him...." (Hebrews 5:8-9)

### **Grace, Faith, and Works**

Salvation is by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-10). Rather than nullifying justification by grace through faith, **righteousness by the obedience of faith unites our faith to God's grace**. Noah was saved by the grace of God (Genesis 6:8) through his own faith (Hebrews 11:7). But he "became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" when he, in obedience to the Lord's command (Genesis 6:14-16), "prepared an ark for the saving of his household." (Hebrews 11:7; cf. Genesis 7:1)

### **Different Kinds of Works**

The Bible mentions many kinds of works: good and evil (Titus 2:14; 2 Timothy 4:18), of God and of darkness (John 6:28-29; Romans 13:12), of Christ and of iniquity (Philippians 2:30; Matthew 7:23), of the Lord and of the flesh (1 Corinthians 15:58; Galatians 5:19), befitting repentance and wicked (Acts 26:20; Colossians 1:21), righteous and hypocritical (Acts 10:35; Matthew 23:3,5), perfect and dead (James 1:4; Hebrews 9:14), of faith and of the law (also called boastful and of righteousness, i.e., earned righteousness) (1 Thessalonians 1:3; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:9; Titus 3:5). Some will cause us to be lost (Galatians 5:19-21), others will not save (Galatians 2:16), but some are essential to justification (John 6:28-29; Philippians 2:12; Galatians 5:6).

**Judgment will be on the basis of our works** (Romans 2:5-10). How can this be if works have nothing to do with our justification?

### **James 2:14-26**

James inquires, "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?" (James 2:14) He uses the terms "save" and

"justified" interchangeably (verses 14,21,23-25). Thus, the question is, Will faith apart from works justify? He answers in verses fifteen through twenty-six.

He first demonstrates by three arguments that faith alone is a dead faith (verses 14-20). Just as it does no good to wish a needy person well unless we do something to relieve his needs, **faith apart from works is dead** (verses 15-17).

Then the inspired writer shows that, apart from works, one can't even prove he has faith (verse 18). **It's not faith or works, it is faith and works.**

Even the demons believe, but they are nonetheless condemned (verse 19). Thus, faith without works is a dead faith (verse 20). **Will a dead faith justify?**

Then James demonstrates by two Old Testament examples that we are justified by faith that works (verses 21-25). First he appeals to the example of Abraham (verses 21-24). Abraham was a Hebrew, godly, a man, a child of God, and the friend of God. He was justified by faith (verse 23; quoting Genesis 15:6), but his faith had to be perfected by works of obedience to God (verse 22), the greatest being his offering of his beloved son of promise, Isaac, upon an altar as a sacrifice in obedience to the command of God (verse 21; cf. Genesis 22:1-18). He thus was the friend of God (verse 23; cf. 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; John 15:14).

What does the example of Abraham demonstrate? **"You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only."** (verse 24) This is the only time the Bible even mentions the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and the inspired writer James emphatically declares it to be a lie.

Then James refers to Rahab the harlot (verse 25; cf. Joshua 2:1-22; 6:22-25). In contrast to Abraham, Rahab was a Gentile, immoral, a woman, an alien, and belonged to God's enemies. How was she saved? She heard about the Lord and the terms of salvation (Joshua 2:10,12-20), she believed (Joshua 2:11,21; Hebrews 11:31), and she obeyed (Joshua 2:1-8,21; James 2:25). Thus, when Jericho perished, Rahab was saved (Joshua 6).

What does James conclude about faith and works in our justification? **"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."** (verse 26). James does not deny salvation by faith, but he emphatically denies justification by faith only (verses 14,17,20,22,24,26).

## **Paul**

In Romans 4:3 Paul quotes Genesis 15:6, even as James does in James 2:23, and employs the passage to prove that justification is not by works (verses 2-5). Do Paul and James contradict each other? The works of which Paul spoke were those of the law of works (Romans 3:27-28), the law of the Jews (3:29), one that pertained to the flesh (4:1) and demanded circumcision (4:9). This was, of course, the law of Moses, the Old Testament. One cannot be justified by it, for that would require sinlessly perfect obedience (Galatians

3:10-12), since its sacrifices will not take away sin (Hebrews 10:1-4), to attempt to be justified by it severs one from Christ (Galatians 5:1-4), and none of us renders sinless obedience (Romans 3:27-28).

But **Paul affirms the necessity of the obedience of faith.** The gospel is preached to save/justify sinners (Romans 1:16-17; 10:1-17). But the purpose of preaching the gospel is to lead sinners to the obedience of faith (Romans 1:5; 16:25-27). Thus, **the obedience of faith is essential to justification before God.**

### Questions for Dave

1. What kind of works does Paul discuss in
  - a. Romans 4?
  - b. Romans 11:6?
  - c. Galatians 3:10?
2. Do demons believe in Christ?
3. Are they justified before God?

### Conclusion

"You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only." (James 2:24) The works that justify are those of the obedience of faith. Thus, **The Scriptures teach that justification before God is by the obedience of faith.**

### Work Cited

Arndt, W.F. and F.W. Gingrich, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament.**

### Negative

#### David N. Landon

"The issue," writes Keith, in his affirmative on justification, "is not justification by faith as opposed to justification by works." It is rather, "justification by faith **alone** versus justification by **obedience which arises from faith.**" (Keith's emphasis.) We might pause at this point and ask what is the difference between these two statements. The very law of God that commanded works also commanded that they be such as would arise from faith.

God never accepted mere external conformity to His law. The issue, Keith continues, "is not faith versus works but **faith alone** in opposition to **working faith**." This statement, more than any other, shows a failure, on Keith's part, to accurately present the Reformed position. The following distinctions will show the real, and fundamental, differences in our respective positions.

1. We distinguish between faith that is real and saving, and faith that is dead, temporary, and devilish. The former will always produce good fruit. The opposition then, between our positions, cannot be such as Keith has described. We do not set faith alone over against working faith. We do set faith as the **alone instrument or means** of justification against the **good works that faith produces** as being the means, or, worse, as being the ground and basis of justification, which is essentially Keith's position. True faith will always have good works following. It is, after all, the most quoted of all the Reformed formulae that, "We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone." Faith alone justifies apart from works, not because works are not necessary (they are; in what sense will be shown under the next point) but because of the object of faith, which is Christ. The place in the scheme of salvation where Keith positions the necessity of works ultimately makes the works themselves to be the object of faith.

2. We distinguish between justification and salvation. Keith makes them to be the same. He writes, "Justification is the legal term for salvation." Making these terms equivalent leads to the obvious error of making works necessary for justification, it being clear from Scripture that they are necessary for salvation. The word *salvation* is the "big picture." It includes all the redemptive acts of God towards sinful man, as well as those actions man performs in response. Salvation includes election, calling, justification, adoption, sanctification (which is where our works come into consideration,) and glorification. It follows that works of obedience may be necessary to salvation in a way that they are not to justification. The exact relationship that works bear to salvation is a necessity *sine qua non* (literally "without which not"). Works *are* a necessary condition of salvation; whether they are necessary as a cause or ground of salvation, or simply as a necessary fruit and evidence of salvation must be discovered by the Scriptures. There is a sense, then, in which we can say that it was necessary for their salvation, for Abraham to offer up his son, for Noah to build an ark, and for Rahab to receive the spies; and yet that they were not thereby justified.

3. We distinguish between works legal, and works evangelical. "The Bible," Keith writes, "mentions many kinds of works." He then lists several categories. Keith greatly errs however, if he does not recognize that all these sorts of "works" can be reckoned either as legal, or evangelical, and that for the purpose of this discussion this is the only meaningful distinction. There are only two covenants, and therefore only two kinds of works. Their works are legal, who live in the spirit of the covenant of works. Only those who have been set free by the Son are enabled to offer evangelical works. Paul gives two rules by which we may distinguish legal works from evangelical.

A. Works performed in a legal spirit will always lead to boasting. Paul writes, "For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath something of which to glory," Romans 4:2. "I

fast. ..I tithe," ( Luke 18:12) is the language of a legal heart. "I built an ark," "I offered up my son," and "I received the spies," are all instances of a legal spirit, and will lead invariably to boasting, if performed prior to, and as a means of, justification. This is why Paul is careful to insist that even our faith is a gift of God, and not something that we are able to work up ourselves, "lest any man should boast," Ephesians 2:9. "Therefore, it is of faith, that it might be by grace," Romans 4:16.

B. Works performed in a legal spirit make God a debtor. Paul writes, "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt," Romans 4:4. There can be no mixture of grace and work; it must be absolute grace, or absolute works, Romans 11:6. Historically, it has been the Reformed, or Calvinistic branch of the Church alone, that has been able to say with Paul that, "God justifies the ungodly," Romans 4:5.

4. We distinguish between imputed and inherent righteousness. Keith states in his affirmative that, "...in different ages God has required varying things for righteousness." I say that if these varying things for righteousness are offered by sinners, for the purpose of justification before God, then they share a common denominator; all are produced by the inherent strength of man. This leads to two important points:

A. This article, of the righteousness of Christ *imputed* to the believer, is that which makes the Reformed tradition essentially different from all other traditions, and it is that over which Keith and I are at greatest odds. We both believe in the necessity of faith and good works; one may be led to suppose that our differences are mere semantics. This point, however, of imputed righteousness, Keith totally rejects. I say that this doctrine glorifies God, honors and establishes His law, and is one of the chief comforts of believers.

B. This article is that wherein Keith's doctrine of justification is essentially the same as all other doctrines of justification, whether Christian (the Reformed excepted) or non-Christian. At the end of the day there is no difference between law keeping, tithing and fasting, pilgrimages, counting beads, ark building, spy receiving, or even offering our only son for sacrifice. As good as these things are in themselves, they take on the nature of works, when performed by our own inherent strength, for the purpose of making ourselves righteous before God.

5. We distinguish between the reasons for which James and Paul wrote their respective letters. At first glance they appear contradictory. James 2:24 seems to disprove what I established in point two above. Traditionally, there have been three ways of solving this problem. Roman Catholic theology distinguishes between an initial justification, by God alone, and a secondary justification, in which our works play a part. Keith distinguishes works, saying that *law works* will not save, but that *God-appointed* gospel works will. The correct way is that of James; to distinguish between a living, saving, works-producing faith, and one that is dead and fruitless.

Paul, in Romans, was combating the legalism that was so prevalent in his day. James was addressing the equally prevalent problem of antinomianism, or libertinism. To the man who wants to add works to faith, we say with Paul that justification is by faith alone. To

the man who *says* he has faith, but shows by his life that his faith is not producing fruit, we say with James, "not by faith only." There is a great difference between what James teaches, and what Keith understands James to teach. It is one thing to say with James, that we are justified by a working faith. It is quite another thing to say with Keith, that we are justified by the works a working faith produces.

An understanding of the above distinctions will help to answer Keith's questions. In Galatians 3:10 Paul writes against those who would be justified by the works of the law. In Romans 4 and Romans 11:6 he condemns all inherent works that are performed in our own strength, for these works will always lead to boasting (Romans 4:2) or to making God a debtor (Romans 4:4; 11:6). It should be noted that Paul also excludes the good works of believers from any part in justification. Ephesians 2:9 is a good example of a place where Paul cannot be excluding only the works of the law, for the Ephesians had nothing to do with that law. Good works come after our creation in Christ, vs 10.

James 2:19 proves our point that James is distinguishing between different kinds of faiths, and that there is a "faith" that does not save. It does not save because it is content with the merely notional, "You believe there is one God." It is the nature of saving faith to look for righteousness in another; such faith is the gift of God.

## **Response**

Keith Sharp

Both propositions in this debate begin with the grounds of proof, "The Scriptures teach." I am once again struck by the fact that my friend deals little with the Scriptures and much with the Reformers. His article is almost half completed before he references one scripture, but he does grace us with Latin terminology of the theologians. I defend the Scriptures; Calvinists defend the Reformers. It is divine wisdom versus human wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

Dave thinks I misrepresent Calvinism. How can I do otherwise? In one sentence he asserts, "Works are a necessary condition of salvation...." Later, he avers, "There can be no mixture of grace and work; it must be absolute grace, or absolute works, Rom. 11:6." If I quote my good friend verbatim, I both represent and misrepresent him. "But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No." (2 Corinthians 1:18)

He accuses me of making good works "the ground and basis of justification." Calvinists fail to comprehend the Lord's statement, "So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do'" (Luke 17:10). A man convicted of premeditated murder cannot do enough "community service" to avoid deserving death (Numbers 35:31). All

responsible people "have sinned" (past) and "fall short" (present) "of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Thus, once we have sinned just once, and we all have, we continue of our own merits to fall short forever of the perfect holiness God requires. We have all committed capital crimes, i.e., we have sinned (Romans 6:23). We must be "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..." (Romans 3:24). Thus, legal works, works done to earn justification and salvation, self-righteous works (Luke 18:9-12; Romans 3:27-28; 4:2,4; 11:6; Galatians 3:10; Ephesians 2:8-10) are futile. Our faith is in Christ and His atonement, not in our perfect obedience. But the Lord has set conditions we must meet to receive the free gift of justification. Those conditions are summarized as "obedience to the faith" (Romans 1:4; 16:26). The conditions for Noah were "Make yourself an ark of gopherwood..." (Genesis 6:14). By faith he obeyed (Hebrews 11:7; Genesis 6:22), and he was therefore justified (Hebrews 11:7; Genesis 7:1). Yet he was justified by grace (Genesis 6:8). To be set free from sin and become righteous (justified), we must obey from the heart (Romans 6:17-18). We earn or deserve nothing but hell, but we must obey to be justified.

Dave flatly rejects that the Scriptures employ the terms "justification" and "salvation" interchangeably. I await his reply to the abundant scriptural proof of this fact in my negative.

I understand Calvinists "distinguish between works legal, and works evangelical." Is this not the same distinction I drew in my affirmative, just without the theological nomenclature of human wisdom? Why are works "legal" if conditions of justification but "evangelical" if conditions of salvation?

The subject of Ephesians 2:8-10 is salvation (verse 8), not justification. If the passage eliminates all works as conditions, it throws out "evangelical works" as conditions of salvation. And I have repeatedly proven that the "gift" of Ephesians 2:8 is salvation by faith, not "faith" itself.

*The word rendered **that** ... is in the neuter gender, and the word **faith** ... is in the feminine. The word 'that,' therefore, does not refer particularly to faith, as being the gift of God, but to **the salvation by grace** of which he had been speaking. (Barnes. 42)*

The "works" of Ephesians 2:8-10 are incompatible with salvation. They are, therefore, "legal" rather than "evangelical."

Dave asserts if we do anything of our own ability as a condition of justification, the works are legal and bring God into debt. Did Noah build the ark by his own ability? Was building the ark essential to his justification? (Genesis 6:13 - 7:1; Hebrews 11:7) Was he justified by grace? (Genesis 6:8)

My friend explains, "We distinguish between imputed and inherent righteousness." So do I, but the Scriptures and I mean something entirely different by "imputed righteousness" than do Calvinists. I accept the statement of the apostle, "But to him who does not work



but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness." (Romans 4:5) Abraham's faith was imputed to him for righteousness (Romans 4:3), when he by faith offered Isaac (James 2:21-23). Our faith is imputed to us for righteousness (Romans 4:5) when we by faith obey from the heart (Romans 6:17-18).

Calvinists imagine their system to be unique because they smugly believe they are the only ones who believe in salvation (or is it justification?) by grace. My friend knows I do not believe we can earn salvation or justification, and the readers know such is not implied by my proposition.

I await an answer to this question: "If justification is independent of our works, how are we either justified or condemned by our words? (Matthew 12:37)"

James does not say Abraham and Rahab were justified by working faith. He says they were and we are justified by works. "Was not Abraham our father justified by works...?" (James 2:21) "Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works...?" (James 2:25) "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:24). How could it be plainer? James does not contradict Paul, but he flatly contradicts Calvinism.

Calvinists affirm, "The Scriptures teach that justification before God is by faith alone." The inspired writer James affirms, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only." It is human wisdom versus divine wisdom. "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, ... But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Indeed, **The Scriptures teach that justification before God is by the obedience of faith.**

### **Work Cited**

Barnes, Albert, **Notes on the New Testament** (Ephesians - Colossians).

### **Affirmative**

**David N. Landon**

Proposition: The Scriptures teach that justification before God is by faith alone.

According to Martin Luther, justification "is the article of a standing and a falling church." I am certain Keith would agree. False ideas on this point cannot help but skew our understanding of virtually every other doctrine of Scripture. Our disagreement is on this word "alone." "The text and thought of St. Paul," wrote Luther, "imperiously demand

[the word 'alone']. An examination of the words justification and faith will show this to be true.

### **Justification, God's Part**

The sum of the Reformed teaching on this doctrine can be found in Romans 4:5, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."

Negatively, justification comes to him "that worketh not." See also Ephesians 2:9, "not of works;" Galatians 2:16, "by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified;" and Romans 11:6, "And if by grace, then is it no more of works." Works can never give a title to life because the obedience God requires for justification is a *perfect* obedience. The law of God as it came to Adam, and was afterwards renewed in the Mosaic covenant, said "Do this, and you shall live." The least sin or disobedience brought death. This law has never been abrogated, Matthew 5:17,18. Man's sinfulness, considered together with the perfection of the law, leads one naturally to ask with Job, "how should man be just before God?"

Positively, justification comes to him that "believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly." Several things need to be observed:

1. Justification is a forensic, or legal matter. The word itself simply means to declare one righteous or just. This is true whether the righteousness in question is inherent or imputed. The word in Scripture is often set in opposition to the words condemn and condemnation. See for instance Deut.25:1. When judges determine controversies they are to "justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked." Compare this text with Proverbs 17:15 and Romans 8:33,34.
2. Justification *is* by works. It is only a question of who performs the works. God is just and holy, and cannot permit that which is unclean to enter heaven. The original covenant that God made with man (called the covenant of works) has become, by reason of sin, impossible to keep. As a result, whatever inherent goodness man has (even after regeneration) is tainted by sin. "Do, and you shall live," is no longer a way of life for fallen man. The word of the covenant of grace is "Live, and you shall do." God has found a way to be both "just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus," Romans 3:26. The perfect law keeping that God requires of those who would have life, He now accepts at the hand of their substitute. Christ has fulfilled the demands of the law on the behalf of those for whom He died.
3. The righteousness then, that is reckoned ours under the covenant of grace, is an imputed one. It consists both in the non-imputation of sin, and in the imputation of righteousness. Concerning the former, David writes, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin," Romans 4:8. Of the latter, Paul writes, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness," Romans 4:3.

4. We are declared righteous in the sight of God, not because of our own merit or good works, but because of the perfect obedience of Christ freely imputed to us. This obedience of Christ is often considered as both active and passive. His passive obedience is His death by which He made atonement for the sins of His people. His active obedience is His entire life of perfectly fulfilling the law of God. The entire obedience of Christ is imputed to us. His atonement ensures our forgiveness, and keeps us from hell. His entire obedience to the law is our guarantee of heaven. It is in this way that the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us, Romans 8:3,4.

5. Although God's decree from eternity was to justify the elect, their actual justification occurs in time. All whom God predestinates He effectually calls [regenerates] and whom He calls He justifies, Romans 8:29,30. The immediate benefits of justification are adoption and union with Christ. While imputation is the formal cause of our justification, it is union with Christ that gives a foundation and reality to imputation. Union with Christ makes imputation to be more than a mere legal fiction. Signified by the recurring phrase "in Christ," it is that which separates true believers from all others. That grace that on our part unites us to Christ, is our faith.

### **Faith, Our Part**

1. Saving faith is the heart's approbation of God's way of salvation. True faith is always contrasted in Scripture with that faith that is dead ( James 2:17) temporary ( Matthew 13:20,21) or devilish (James 2:19). Those who possess these spurious faiths may have great knowledge of the content of the Scriptures, and may also give assent to them as being true. There may even be great zeal for God, and a seeking for righteousness, as was the case with the Jews. In spite of all these admirable qualities of false faith, there is yet one thing lacking,- trust. Saving faith goes beyond mere knowledge and assent; there is also a full trust of and acquiescency in God, and particularly in Christ, as God's way of salvation.

2. It is faith's peculiar function to unite us to Christ. It is this union that is the basis, or foundation, of our right to all His benefits. Faith is that instrument that, on our part, puts us "in Christ." It is there, "in the beloved," that we are accepted, Ephesians 1:6, It is by virtue of this union that Christ, by the grace of God, is made unto us righteousness, 1 Cor. 1:30.

3. While union with Christ is, on our part, effected by faith, it is essential, to a correct understanding of our subject, to place Christ's part in our justification as prior, both in time and nature, to ours. It is He, who by His Spirit, effectually calls, or regenerates, all those the Father has given Him. Having called them, He pronounces them just. This justification of the elect is prior to any good work performed by them. God justifies the ungodly, Romans 4:5. The righteousness they are reckoned as having, is a federal, or imputed one, as opposed to one that is personal, or inherent.

4. It follows that we are not justified on account of our faith, as if faith is now accepted by God in place of works. This is clear from that of Paul in Romans 4:5, that God

justifies the ungodly. Faith itself is not respected prior to justification, but is merely the instrument, on our part, that unites us to Christ.

5. While evangelical works of obedience are not the basis of our acceptance by God, they do invariably follow justification. All who are in Christ will find that He is made of God unto them, not only righteousness, but sanctification also, 1 Cor. 1:30. Good works, according to the Westminster Confession of Faith, "are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith," xvi,2. It is certain that almost all errors concerning justification stem from a failure to properly distinguish justification from sanctification. Justification is a legal declaration that we are righteous. It is a one-time event, and is found equally in all Christians. Sanctification is a life long process wherein we are made righteous in ourselves, by the work of the Spirit. There are then, two distinct modes of righteousness. The righteousness we possess as a result of justification is perfect, but not inherent. The righteousness we have as a result of sanctification is inherent, but not perfect. When we are glorified, we will be righteous both perfectly and inherently.

### **Faith is Alone**

We have seen above that God's justice is such that nothing less than perfect obedience will suffice us. The difference between law and gospel, is that what the law requires, the gospel gives. Paul could say that he was not ashamed of the gospel, for in it was a "righteousness of God," that God gave to those that believe, Romans 1:16,17. It is union with Christ that gives one a title to this righteousness, and it is faith alone, that, on our part, effects this union. Love, hope, perseverance, and good works, while all necessary for salvation, contribute nothing to our justification, but are only evidences that we have been justified.

The word "alone" may scandalize. Luther said Paul's phrase "without the works of the law," scandalized more. I say that this sentence of Paul's that, "God ...justifies the ungodly," scandalizes the most. We conclude that the Scriptures teach that justification before God is by faith alone.

### **Negative**

#### **Keith Sharp**

I commend David for a well written defense of the Calvinistic position on justification. But, as Calvinism is a system of "fables" (Greek, "*muthos*," i.e. "myths"; cf. 1 Timothy 1:4; 2 Timothy 4:4), my friend's treatise is built on a series of seven myths.

Myth 1: Justification is prior to salvation and sanctification, is more important doctrinally, and is a once-for-all-time event. But salvation and justification are

inseparable (Romans 10:8-10; James 2:14, 24), as are justification and sanctification (1 Corinthians 6:11). If justification is independent of our works, how are we either justified or condemned by our works? (Matthew 12:37) The obedient lives of Christians are "leading to (Greek "*eis*", "unto") righteousness (i.e., justification, Romans 4:1-3)." (Romans 6:16) "You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only." (James 2:24) We are justified, sanctified, and saved when we first become Christians (1 Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:4-7), there is a process of each in our lives (1 John 1:9; Hebrews 10:14; Philippians 2:12); and final justification, sanctification, and salvation depend upon faithful obedience (Romans 6:16; 2 Timothy 2:19-22; 1 Peter 1:3-5).

Myth 2: We are under the same law as Adam and Israel. The law Moses gave to Israel was for Israel alone and was never given to their forefathers, including Adam (Deuteronomy 5:1-22). The Master declared, "till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass away till all is fulfilled." (Matthew 5:17-18) What if a union spokesman vowed, "Till heaven and earth passes away, we won't go back to work, till our demands are met"? If their demands are met, they'll go back to work. All the law was fulfilled in Christ (Galatians 3:19-25; Romans 10:4), and it was abrogated by His death on the cross (Colossians 2:13-17). We are "under law toward Christ." (1 Corinthians 9:21)

Myth 3: The works by which we cannot be justified (Romans 4:5; 11:6; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:9) are equivalent to "obedience to the faith." (Romans 1:5; 16:25-26) Calvinists need to read Romans 4:5 more carefully. Justification in Christ is not to him who does not depend on works (Calvinistic idea), but "to him who does not work." (Romans 4:5) If the works of Romans 4:5 are equivalent to "obedience to the faith," we must refuse to obey Christ if we are to be justified.

Myth 4: The righteous life of Christ is imputed (credited to the account) of the believer. "Abraham believed God, and it (his faith, KS) was accounted (imputed, KS) to him for ("*eis*", "unto") righteousness." (Romans 4:3) "But to him who does not work (keep the law of works, Romans 3:27-28, the Mosaic law, Romans 2:12-29) but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted (imputed, KS) for ("*eis*", "unto") righteousness." (Romans 4:5) God sets the faith of the believer, manifested in obedience to the faith, down to his account, so He might declare him righteous. The basis is the blood sacrifice of Christ, by which "He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." (Romans 3:21-26) This is the "righteousness of God" (Romans 3:21-22) revealed in the gospel (Romans 1:16-17). Calvinists lack faith in the atonement. They believe Jesus' death on the cross delivers us from hell, but God has to give us credit for the life of the Son to bring us to heaven. Our hope of an "eternal inheritance" rests squarely on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:13-15).

Nor does 1 Corinthians 1:30 teach the Calvinistic idea of imputation. Not only is Christ our "righteousness," He is also "for us wisdom from God - ... and sanctification and redemption." (Ibid) If the verse means God sets down to our account (imputes) the righteous life of Christ, it also means He gives us credit for the wisdom, sanctification, and redemption (fact He was redeemed) that belonged to Jesus. Of course Christ was not

redeemed; He is the Redeemer (Titus 2:11-14). Furthermore, Calvinists believe sanctification is a process independent of justification. God does not impute to us the wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption of the Savior. Rather, Jesus is the source of these things for us: wisdom by His revelation of God's will; righteousness, sanctification, and redemption by His death (Roman 3:21-26; Hebrews 10:10).

Myth 5: The only alternatives for justification are to live a sinlessly perfect life ourselves or to have the perfect life of Jesus imputed to us. Once again, Calvinists lack faith in the efficacy of the atonement. The animal sacrifices of the law could never "make those who approach perfect" (Hebrews 10:1), but "by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified." (Hebrews 10:14) "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." (Hebrews 7:25) Those who are baptized into Christ have all past sins forgiven (Colossians 2:11-13), and when those in Christ sin, "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

It is ironic that my friend uses Romans 8:3-4 to try to prove we cannot be justified by any law. Verse two, the immediate context, reveals: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." Verses two and three mention three laws: "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," i.e., the gospel (Romans 1:16-17), "the law of sin and death," i.e., the rule of sin in the sinner's life, leading to death, and "the law" (verse 3), i.e., the Mosaic covenant. The gospel by which we are saved is the law of Christ which frees us from sin. By obedience to the gospel (Romans 10:16) we receive the benefit of the sacrifice of Christ, justification (Romans 3:21-26).

Myth 6: "Faith" in Romans 4:5 means "faith alone." My friend's highest authority on this point is Luther, the same Martin Luther who called the inspired book of James "an epistle of straw" (Schaff. 7:362) and seriously considered not including it in the German Bible. Why? "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only." (James 2:24) This is the only time in the Bible justification by faith only is mentioned, and James by inspiration emphatically brands it a lie. Paul never affirmed justification by faith alone, although Luther "imperiously" inserted the word "alone" in Romans 3:28 (Schaff. 7:361-2). Saving faith to both Paul and James is equivalent to "obedience to the faith." (Romans 1:5; 16:25-26) Yes, saving faith includes trust, but trust means we believe "He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." (Hebrews 11:6) If you believe in your medical doctor, you trust him enough to take the medicine he prescribes, even though you don't like the medicine and don't understand how it works. To have justifying faith means we trust the Savior sufficiently to obey Him even though we don't understand why He so commands us and don't like the things He requires (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Yes, "It is faith's peculiar function to unite us to Christ," but when and how does it do so? "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Galatians 3:26-27)

Yes, "God justifies the ungodly." He also saves sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). But the Lord doesn't save sinners while they are still sinning (Luke 13:1-5), and He doesn't justify the ungodly while they remain in their ungodliness (Romans 1:18).

Yes, we are justified "on account of our faith." "Faith is accounted for righteousness." (Romans 4:5) That doesn't mean we merit justification (Romans 4:4). It means faith, obedience to the faith, is the condition upon which God gives us the gift of justification. Yes, a free gift may be conditional. The "gift of the Holy Spirit" is conditioned upon repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38). God gave Israel the city of Jericho (Joshua 6:2), but they had to meet conditions to receive the free gift (Joshua 6:3-5). They by faith had to obey.

Myth 7: Works of obedience have nothing to do with our justification. "You see then that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." The death of the Savior is the basis of justification (Romans 3:21-26), but obedience to the faith is the condition (Romans 1:5; 16:25-26).

Protestants are scandalized by James 2:14-24. It so scandalized Luther, he wanted to leave it out of the Bible. Augustine, Luther, Calvin and other theologians constructed a system of fables, myths, to uphold the damnable error of justification by faith alone, the central tenet of Protestant theology. The truth of God's word remains: "You see then that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only."

### **Work Cited**

Philip Schaff, **History of the Christian Church.**

### **Response**

#### **David Landon**

Luther, in his commentary on Galatians, said that the article of justification cannot be beaten into men's heads sufficiently. When I read of certain aspects of this article being referred as "myths" I cannot but feel that Luther spoke truly. Response to "myth:" #1. Justification The declaration by God that we are just (justification) must come before sanctification because it is a justification of the ungodly. This declaration is of a perfect righteousness and therefore needs no repetition. That justification is a process, or that there is a "final justification" is nothing but sheer Romanism (Trent, canon 24).

#2. Law- Keith chose an unfortunate text to prove his point. Matthew 5:17-19 is the locus classicus for demonstrating the abiding validity of the law. That the word fulfill in vs 17 means confirm is shown both by its antithesis destroy and by the sermon itself in which

Jesus does not abrogate but, rather, confirms the law by His exposure of the Pharisee's misuse of the same. The entire sermon is a re-establishment and ratification of the law of God.

#3. Works- A failure to distinguish between justification and salvation is the root cause of much of the muddled thinking on this doctrine. In this case it leads Keith to say that if we are not justified by works of obedience, then such works are no longer necessary. The teaching of the Reformation was Pauline throughout; we are saved by grace, through faith, unto good works, Ephesians 2:8-10.

#4. Imputation "That a righteousness that resides in heaven should justify me, a sinner on earth, is a great mystery," wrote John Bunyun. Mystery, not myth. Why is it that so many are able to accept the mystery of how the benefits of Christ's death are imputed to the believer, but cannot accept the imputation of the benefits of His life? Saying that outfaith is imputed for righteousness makes the gospel subjective. Works of obedience end up being the object of faith rather than Christ. I did not cite I Corinthians 1:30 as proof of imputation, but of union with Christ. It is this identity with Christ that enables the believer to say with Luther "Mine are Christ's living, doing, and speaking. His suffering and dying; mine as much as if I had lived, done, spoken, suffered, and died as He did."

#5. Perfect life- Keith fails to distinguish between justification and sanctification. The alternative is not between the perfect life of Christ or the perfect life of the believer. Instead the believer has the perfect life of Christ imputed to him in justification, and, as a result of regeneration, receives the Holy Spirit who enables him to live out his own inherently imperfect life in an ever increasing obedience to God. I marvel that Keith would say that Calvinists "lack faith in the efficacy of the atonement." I remind Keith that it is the Calvinist who says that the atonement actually saves. It does not, as Keith believes, merely make salvation possible.

#6. Faith- Luther's works contain hard sayings against the law and against the Jews, as well as against the epistle of James. Is he therefore an antinomian and anti-Semitic? It is an easy thing to pick sentences from these dicta heroica and find matter with which to vilify him. Read Luther in context (especially comparing earlier works with later) and such objections will be found without merit.

James does not deny justification by faith alone. He does deny that temporary or devilish faith will save. It profits nothing merely to "say" one has faith (verse 14). The epistle of James treats of faith in its evidentiary aspects,- "I will show thee my faith by my works," (verse 18). Keith errs greatly in making faith and "obedience to the faith" equivalent. This results in making faith entirely subjective and man centered.

Keith's doctor illustration is in line with his theology. Man is only sick in sin and trespasses, and is able to help himself once he receives the prescription. Scripture represents man as dead in sin and in need of a physician who both prescribes and applies the remedy.



It makes sense to speak of conditions of salvation only if you make a distinction between conditions that are causal and those that are consequent. Unregenerate man, being dead in sin, is unable to perform any causal conditions; God justifies the ungodly, Romans 4:5. Obviously the ungodly, once regenerated and justified, do not remain in their ungodliness. There are consequent conditions of salvation such as faith, repentance, and perseverance that God has appointed as means of bringing His elect to glory. The fulfillment of these conditions is certain to the elect, for Christ has promised to finish His work in us, Philippians 1:6.

#7. Works ( a variation of #3 above ) Keith has concocted a myth of his own, namely, that justification by faith alone is a damnable error believed by only a handful of theologians. These truths have been constantly affirmed by the most eminent of God's saints across the centuries. Consider, for example, the testimony left us by the Puritans, men whose personal lives and ministries were beyond reproach. They were Calvinists, almost to a man. As to the doctrine of justification by faith alone being "damnable," I would ask Keith, How is it so? I have demonstrated that our doctrine secures personal obedience to the faith as well as his. I might well ask, where will his righteousness appear if the doctrine of imputed righteousness is true.

There was a time when the gospel was not good news to Martin Luther. He understood Romans 1:17( that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel ) to mean the righteousness that God required of him. The gospel became good news to Luther only when he realized that the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel is not one that God requires but, rather, it is one that God gives. We receive this righteousness by faith alone.