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Finally, brethren
WHATEVER THINGS are true
 are noble
 are just
 are pure
 are lovely
 are of good report
 IF THERE IS ANY VIRTURE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

You can download this month's Meditate On These Things as a PDF file by clicking [here](#). Also, an archive of past MOTT issues is available at christistheway.com.

Question from Arkansas About "Water" in John 3:5

Question

Does the structure of John 3:5 require that "water" refers back to fleshly birth?

Answer

When Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, came to the Master at night, the Lord shockingly declared, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). This led Nicodemus to pose two questions, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"(John 3:4). The first question, "How can a man be born when he is old?," involves the method of the new birth. The second, "Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?," involves the nature of the new birth.

In verse 5 the Master answers Nicodemus' first question, how to be born again. In verses 6-8 Christ answers the second question by stating the spiritual nature of the new birth.

Thus, all of John 3:5 is an explanation how to be born again. To make this refer to physical birth is both out of place and unnecessary. Surely we cannot be born again if we haven't been physically born!

There's nothing about the construction of the sentence that rules out water applying to water baptism. In Matthew 18:3, the Lord declared, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." The "unless" indicates the essentiality of the

two conditions, being converted and becoming as little children. Likewise, the “unless” of John 3:5 states the necessity of two conditions to the new birth - of water and of the spirit.

When Jesus described physical birth, he described it as “of blood” (John 1:13), meaning of the Jewish blood line.

Only one element of the gospel is connected with water. “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:36).

The water of John 3:5 is water baptism.

Coasting Along

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

Recently, someone asked me, “What is your biggest concern for the next generation as it relates to the kingdom?” That’s a good question, as each generation has its own challenges, some of which are the same in every generation, for our world is challenged daily by Satan. Yet there are new challenges, as youth today face challenges that were unknown in my youth. But I suppose every generation has faced things that were unknown to their forefathers.

Has it not been so from earliest times? Consider the generation that entered the promised land under Joshua’s leadership, a generation that made a solemn vow:

“If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” The people answered and said, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; for the LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and who did these great signs in our sight and preserved us through all the way in which we went and among all the peoples through whose midst we passed” (Joshua 24:15-17).

The Israelites had witnessed some of the greatest miracles of history, had received manifold blessings from God, and solemnly vowed to serve him faithfully. But just two chapters later, we have these words recorded: “All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel” (Judges 2:10).

I have just read “Traces of the Kingdom,” a fascinating look at the persecutions Christians endured in Europe, mainly England, hundreds of years before our “Restoration Movement” in the United States. I marvel at the strong faith of these saints who often had to meet in secret, who had their lands and possessions confiscated. Multiplied thousands were tortured, burned at the stake or starved to death in prison. And yet they persevered. They were militant in their proclamation of the gospel, fearlessly debating their religious foes, and not flinching from pointing out the error in the false religions around them.

Have we become complacent in the midst of our comfort and freedom? Do we have such a desire to blend in and not cause any disagreements that we go out of our way not to offend? Obviously it should never be our intent to offend, but truth does sometimes offend, even when spoken in the kindest way. Christ offended people (Matthew 13:57; 15:12). Paul offended people (Acts 16:22-23, etc.). John the Baptist offended Herod, and got his head cut off (Mark 6:22-28).

Would the prophet Amos proclaim to us as he did so many years ago to Israel: “Woe to them that are at ease in Zion” (Amos 6:1)? Where is our militant spirit? Oh, we may be militant about not missing our favorite TV show or football game, but are we militant about the gospel? In the past, we have seen as many as 15 or 18 baptized into Christ here in one year. Question: What is the origin of these converts? In

the first five years of the congregation, 41 were baptized, 66% of those were the result of evangelism, i.e., they were not our family members, or those who sought us out. In the past five years, 47 have been baptized, and about 47% were the result of evangelism. Consider also that 30+ years ago we started with 12 members, and may have reached 50 or 60 in the first five years. In the past five years, we have had 120 or more members. So what's the point in all these figures? It would seem we have become less militant and more at ease in Zion. Just four were baptized in 2012. Two were from evangelism!

So, what is my concern for the next generation? I will state it in a positive manner. (1) We must be grounded in sound doctrine. Lessons to edify and encourage are needed, but we also need teaching on doctrine, that our roots may be firmly planted in truth. (2) We must be a committed people—faithful in our assembling together, and committed to living a godly life every day of the week. (3) We must be committed to congregational and personal evangelism. We cannot wait for the lost to seek us. “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Jesus didn't wait for the lost to seek him. (4) We must be diligent in instilling The Faith in our children, for the world and our educational systems are determined to destroy their faith. My grandfather often said, “Brethren, we are drifting.” Let it not be said of us. (References are to the church in Roswell, Georgia, starting in 1974 and on through 2004, the date of the writing of this article.)

Why Adulterous Marriages Must Be Terminated

Pat Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

Jesus said in Matt 19:9a “Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery.” So if a person divorces their spouse for any reason other than fornication and marries another, Jesus calls that second marriage adultery. Passages like I Corinthians 6:9-10 say “adulterers” (among other type sinners) “shall not inherit the kingdom of God” – they won't be saved. But one can repent of adultery and be forgiven just like any other sin. The question is – how does one repent to be forgiven of adultery in an unscriptural marriage?

Let's start to answer that question by talking about what adultery is. Vines Bible Dictionary defines “adulterer” as “one who has unlawful intercourse with the spouse of another.” So adultery involves sexual intercourse. We see this also from:

- John 8:4 “They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.” – this woman was not caught in a wedding ceremony, but she was caught having sex with a man other than her husband.
- Hebrews 13:4 “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” – adultery is something done in bed
- Matthew 5:28 “... whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” – we are not talking about fantasizing about a wedding ceremony here.

Now if adultery involves sexual intercourse, then we can see why a couple who are married in violation of verses like Matthew 19:9 can't just say, “I am sorry,” and stay in their marriage. Because every time they sleep together the sin is repeated; they commit adultery. Repentance leads to quitting a sin. We see this from Matthew 21:28-29, where a son was asked to go work in his father's vineyard. At first he said, “I will not: but afterward he repented, and went.” His repentance there was a change of mind that led to a change of action. So repentance means those who steal must quit stealing (Ephesians 4:28); those who cuss must quit cussing (Ephesians 4:29); those who lie must quit lying (Revelation 21:8); those in homosexual relationships must terminate those relationships (Romans 1:26-27); and those in adulterous marriages must quit committing adultery - they must terminate those marriages (Luke 16:18). Just like with any other sin, repentance means we “walk away” from that sin – in this case the adulterous marriage. There are no ifs ands or buts about it.

We see this truth illustrated by an event that occurred while the Old Testament law was still in effect. We

learn from secular history Herod had divorced his wife and Herodias had divorced her husband. Now notice what Mark 6:17-18 states about this marriage –

“For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias’ sake, his brother Philip’s wife: for he had married her. For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife.”

John the Baptist didn’t just say it was unlawful for Herod to have married Herodias; he said it was unlawful for Herod to have her.

Here in Alabama we have a law against smoking marijuana, a law against selling marijuana, and just in case someone claimed they were going to do neither with their marijuana, a law against possessing marijuana. So if you live in Alabama and you possess some marijuana and you want to get right with the law of Alabama, what would you have to do with that marijuana? You would have to burn it, throw it in the garbage, or give it to the police – because it is not lawful to have it. It is the same with an adulterous marriage. If it is not lawful for you to have her (as John said), then you must get rid of her, that is, terminate the marriage, right?

Jesus went on to say in Matthew 19:9b “whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.” So when a divorce occurs, not only is it wrong for the one doing the divorcing to remarry; it is also wrong for the one who was put away to remarry. Neither party may remarry. Why?

I like to say Matthew 19:9 states the facts of the case that the divorced commit adultery if they remarry, while Rom 7:2-3 states the reason. Here’s how that passage reads –

“For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.”

So the reason it is wrong for divorced people to remarry is because they are bound (obligated) to one another for life. Just because the state of Alabama says I have a right to remarry a second time, that doesn’t mean God gives me that right. He expects me to stay with my wife “till death do us part,” and so if I divorce her for a reason other than fornication and remarry, I am committing adultery (cheating) “against her” (Mark 10:11) because I am still obligated to her; I am still supposed to be married to her.

Some say you shouldn’t terminate an adulterous marriage because “two wrongs don’t make a right.” I agree two wrongs never make a right, but in this case, terminating an unscriptural marriage is not a wrong; it is a correct course of action; it is a requirement. What if I did wrong by taking on a second wife (polygamous)? Would it be a second wrong to repent and divorce the second wife, and go back to being monogamous with the first? Of course not.

A passage that illustrates having to leave a spouse because it is the right thing to do is Luke 18:29 which reads

“And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God’s sake, Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.”

Why would anybody ever have to leave their wife for the kingdom of God’s sake?; I thought God wanted us to stay with our spouses. Well, if we are married to a woman we have no right to after an unscriptural divorce, then Matthew 19:9 calls that marriage adulterous, and so we would have to leave that wife for the kingdom of God’s sake.

Noting how clear these passages are on divorce and remarriage, a friend recently asked me why so many

preachers don't hold to the truth on the subject. I submitted the following quotes to possibly explain why:

- "Some conservative groups believe that divorced people who marry another spouse are living in sin. However, the number of divorces in the United States has led most denominations away from that teaching." – Anthony Durnavant in the Orange County (California) Register
- The (Presbyterian USA) church should "re-evaluate its definition of sin to reflect the changing mores of society. ... We feel that marriage is not what legitimates sexual gratification." (Roll Over John Calvin, Time Magazine, 5-6-91, p.59)
- ... the Rev. Gene Robinson (first gay bishop in the Episcopal Church) ... cited the examples of ordaining women priests and accepting divorce in the church as departures ... "Just simply saying it departs from ... Scripture does not necessarily make it wrong." (Birmingham News, Aug 6, 2003)
- I suppose the reason we leaped at The Origin of Species was because the idea of God interfered with our sexual mores (practices). (Sir Julian Huxley, one of the world's leading evolutionists)

So preachers and churches have not changed on the divorce issue over the last several decades because of honest investigation of the scriptures. Instead they've changed (compromised) because they have lost respect for the scriptures as their source of religious authority.

Conclusion: If one can see why a gay marriage must be terminated upon repentance (to be right with God), then apply the same logic to adulterous marriages. It's that simple.

King Saul's Excuses

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

In 1 Samuel 15 we have the story of Samuel, sent by God, instructing Saul to destroy the Amalekites. The Lord had not forgotten what Amalek did to the children of Israel when they had left Egypt, who attacked their rear ranks (Exodus 17:8-16; Deuteronomy 25:17-19). Though this had occurred over 400 years earlier (Adam Clark; Matthew Poole) it was now time for God to blot out remembrance of this people for the deed they had done. King Saul was to utterly destroy them and all they had (verse 3). Over the next several verses in this chapter we can see the failure of this man and the excuses offered by him.

In verse 13 we see the first excuse offered, "I have performed the commandment of the Lord." This is what one would call a half-truth or in reality a lie. Samuel heard the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen (verse 14). If he had completely complied with the Lord's commandment, he would not have these animals taken from the Amalekites with him. Partial obedience is not accepted by our Heavenly Father.

It doesn't seem to take Saul long to think of another excuse, the people (they) spared the best to sacrifice for the Lord (verse 15), and the rest (we) have utterly destroyed. Surely God will accept this excuse, the animals were brought back for His benefit. The odor of these sacrifices might come up as sweet aroma to Jehovah. In verse 18 the prophet reminds Saul again of what he was instructed to do, utterly destroy. Twice in verse 19 Samuel asked the king "why" he failed to comply. It is very interesting how the prophet worded the second part of this conversation, "Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the Lord" (verse 19)? So, was the spoil brought back for the Lord or for Saul? Obviously, he wanted this for himself!

Then he again says he had obeyed the voice of the Lord, much like in verse 13, and that he had utterly destroyed Amalek (v. 20). Yet he says in this verse he had brought back Agag king of Amalekites. It may have been selfish pride on his part for bringing this king back, to show he had been victorious over this man. Was he instructed to this by God? Absolutely not!

None of his excuses have been accepted about why he had disobeyed, so now he further attempts to shift the blame. "But the people took of the plunder" (verse 21). Who was the king? That would be him. Who was the one with power to punish the disobedient? He was. Who was the one who swooped down on the spoils according to Samuel? Once again, he was the guilty party. And in this verse, he admitted those sheep and

oxen should have been destroyed. So he understood exactly what he was told to do.

One last excuse offered by Saul. He admitted he had sinned, transgressing the command of the Lord and the words delivered to him by Samuel. Yet he said I sinned “because I feared the people and obeyed their voice” (verse 24). The king seems to be grasping for straws. Was he really afraid of the people? I doubt it very seriously. Yet even if he was, he had to fear God even more (Matthew 10:28).

Which of the excuses did the Lord accept? None of them. Saul was rejected from being king over Israel (verses 23, 28). What does the Lord delight in? Obedience (verse 22). How is rebellion and stubbornness described? As the sin of witchcraft, iniquity, and idolatry (verse 23).

What great lessons do we learn from this story about Saul and his excuses offered to God? (1) If we are making excuses for not obeying the Lord, we better stop and be obedient. (2) What if I have only done part of what He has instructed me to do? Recognize the need to comply with all His will. You see partial obedience is no obedience at all. Lots of people believe in God and His Son, yet they have never repented, confessed, and been baptized (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; 8:37-38, etc.). And there are numbers of people who have obeyed these first principles, yet they must remain faithful to the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10, etc.). (3) God doesn't forget. He remembered what the Amalekites had done to His people hundreds of years after the fact. Time does not cure sin, only repentance (Acts 17:30). (4) Sin has consequences, even if one is forgiven by Jehovah. Saul admitted he had sinned (verse 30), yet he was still rejected from being king (verses 23, 28). One of the saddest verses in this chapter is, “And Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death. Nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul, and the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel” (verse 35).

Dear Father, help each of us be obedient to Your will, never disappointing You as we strive to serve You faithfully! If we fail, may we repent and not try to excuse our failures.

Do I HAVE to Attend Evening Services?

Mike Thomas | Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA

"Oh what a weariness!" This was the attitude of the Jews who lost interest in worshipping God, as described in Malachi 1:13. They had grown tired of gathering for the scheduled feasts and sacrifices and were uninterested in applying themselves to genuine worship. "Oh, what a weariness" it was for them to take time out of their busy schedules to meet this necessary obligation to God. Worship wasn't just a chore; it was an interference. They saw no real purpose in centering their lives around it, much less in giving more than they had to. The same verse also says, "And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?" Instead of their worship being a joyous event in their relationship with God, these Jews viewed it as a wearisome task and necessary burden. "I'm doing this because I have to, not because I want to" is another way of describing their attitude.

Have we also grown cold in our love and appreciation for God? Do we no longer see Him as the One who has given us life—in a world filled with beauty and joyous moments? Have we forgotten His great love for us in providing salvation for us through His Son? What about attending Sunday evening services? Is our attitude "do I have to" and "we're only required to worship once on Sundays"? Or do we have a spirit of gratitude for the privilege and opportunity to have one more time together as brethren to build each other up and glorify God? Remember, God wants us to view public worship as a blessing. "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

I realize the number of services is a matter of judgment. And I also believe it is possible for faithful brethren to decide it is best for their situation to forego an evening service. Who am I to "judge" a group for that decision (Romans 14:10)? That's between them and God. However, if we have the opportunity to

assemble at a scheduled service, why would we NOT want to meet? Are we so caught up in life that the thought of glorifying God is no longer appealing? Could it be we have lost sight of our purpose in life and have hardened our hearts to all He has done for us? That is the warning given us when looking back at unfaithful Israel. "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God...lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:12-13).

Elton Dilbeck asked some very good questions regarding our attitude toward the church in "Which Disturbs You the Most?"

- A soul lost in hell or a scratch on your new car?
- A sermon ten minutes too long or lunch a half-hour late?
- Your missing the worship or missing a day's work?
- The church not growing or the garden not growing?
- Your Bible being unopened or your newspaper being unread?
- Contribution decreasing or your income decreasing?
- Your children late to Bible Class or late to school?
- Missing Bible class or missing your favorite TV program?
- Church work neglected or housework neglected?
- Low attendance at worship or low attendance at a party?

These are soul-searching thoughts that should get us to see how we truly view the church and its assemblies. What matters most to us – this earthly life or the eternal life to come? Which has our highest affection? Honestly, if we have the ability to assemble one more time on Sunday, to honor God "in spirit and truth," why would we not want to be there? Is He deserving of our finest efforts and sacrifices? Or is it a "weariness" to give Him a little bit more?

I Shall Go To Him

TEXTS TO PAUSE & PONDER ON

William Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

The Bible has more to say about the life of David than any other person. We first meet him in 1 Samuel 16 as the young man who would one day be king. Both 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles follow his reign, and the beginning of 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles tell of his old age and death. Many of the Psalms were penned by David, and in them, we are given insight into his life, struggles, and faith.

One of the saddest, and yet exceptional moments of David's life on record is the fallout from his sin with Bathsheba. His sins in this situation are many: laziness (2 Samuel 11:1), lust (2 Samuel 11:2), adultery (2 Samuel 11:3-4), deceit and laying a stumbling block (2 Samuel 11:5-13), and even pre-meditated murder (2 Samuel 11:14-17).

The first half of his sin spiral was entered into willingly and with excitement. The latter half was his attempt to cover up the first. He couldn't bear to acknowledge his sin before the people, so he did whatever he could to hide it. And doing so cost several innocent men their lives (2 Samuel 11:16-17).

At the beginning of 2 Samuel 12, a prophet of God confronted David. Nathan hears the king confess his sin, and reveals that he would be forgiven (2 Samuel 12:13), but the child who would be born to Bathsheba would die (2 Samuel 12:14).

After his birth, the child became ill (2 Samuel 12:15). David fasted and prayed for days for his son, but on the seventh day of his short life, the child died (2 Samuel 12:16-18). David's servants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, but noticing that they all whispered, he realized the child was dead. He got up, washed himself, and ate. His servants were confused about his actions (2 Samuel 12:19-21). His explanation reveals an understanding of life and the afterlife. He would no longer see his son in this world,

but he held onto the hope of seeing him in eternity. He stated,

"While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

(2 Samuel 12:22-23)

David declared his faith in eternal life, but much more, his statement is a commitment to do God's will. One cannot have the hope of heaven and walk in sin. If he would see his son again, then he must obey the Lord, not his own desires.

Anyone who has lost a child clings to the same hope expressed here. In a prominent place at our home, we have a plaque which reads, "We shall go to Jesse, but Jesse shall not return to us."

We serve a great God who desires for us to be with Him forever. He knows the pain of losing a child, for He lost His own Son for a time, as Jesus came to redeem us from sin.

This record in the life of David gives hope to all who have lost a young one, experienced a miscarriage, etc.. If we serve the Lord faithfully, if we direct our focus to heavenly matters and make it our aim to be with the Lord eternally, we have the promise of God, we will meet and share eternity with these little ones who were not long for this world.

Justification (Part 1)

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Commenting on Romans 3:24-26, Moses E. Lard wrote:

"In this compressed and comprehensive sentence we have the ground of the whole remedial system. On this ground depends everything. To expand it, in all its amplitude, would be to write the history of human redemption, from its conception in the mind of God up to its consummation in the glorification of the saved" (Lard. 116).

Paul's letter to the Romans is the greatest treatise on the gospel plan of salvation ever written. Having greeted the brethren in Rome, he announced his proposition and theme: the gospel, God's power to save (Romans 1:16-17). The apostle began to build his case by showing the universal need for this salvation. The Gentiles rejected God, so God rejected them (Romans 1:18-32, especially verses 24, 26, 28). The Jews cheered, until Paul declared they were no better than the Gentiles (Then they jeered), since God gave them the law, but they didn't keep it (chapter 2). Then the apostle answered Jewish objections to his point (3:1-8) and clinched his argument on the universal need of salvation by a series of quotations from Jewish Scripture, establishing that all, Jews as well as Greeks, have sinned (3:9-19).

He concludes: "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). Certainly no law, merely as law, a system of requirements with rewards and punishments, can justify sinners, but the apostle specifically had in mind the Old Covenant, the law God gave the Jews (2:17-18). All the law, and any law as law, accomplishes is to show us our sins. So Jew and Gentile alike, indeed, all mankind, are lost and in need of salvation.

How can sinners, vile, defiled, guilty, be justified, declared innocent, not guilty, before the infinitely holy God without causing God to be unjust? That is the central question of eternal salvation. The gospel of Christ is the only answer.

"But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to

demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:21-26).

The System of Justification

“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference (verses 21-22).

The negative conjunction “But” introduces the contrast with the time before the gospel when as yet the divine plan of human redemption was unrevealed. In contrast Paul deals with “now,” in this present age, when the gospel has been revealed. The subject is “the righteousness of God,” the divine plan for man to be righteous, right before God and under His law, i.e. not guilty (cf. 1:17). It is “apart from the law,” that is, not through keeping the Mosaic law or any other law as a mere system of requirements. This plan is “witnessed by the law and the prophets.” The witness of the law and the prophets includes both the types of the Levitical priesthood and animal sacrifices (cf. Hebrews 8:4-5) and predictive prophecy (e.g. Acts 3:18-26; Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Genesis 12:3; 22:18; Hebrews 8:6-13; Jeremiah 31:31-34). These bear witness to the gospel as the divine means of salvation. In contrast with the law, it is “through faith in Jesus Christ,” that is, both conviction and trust: believing He is the Son of God (Romans 10:10) and trusting Him to fulfill His promises so that we obey Him (Hebrews 11:6) that we obtain righteousness.

The Scope of Justification

“even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (verses 22-23).

This righteousness is “to all and on all who believe,” that is, have obedient faith. This is because “there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Jew and Gentile are all alike in regard to guilt, for all desperately need salvation, since “all have sinned.” All responsible people have violated the law of God (1 John 3:4), whether once or a million times is irrelevant, for “the wages of sin,” one or a million, “is death” (Romans 6:23). Thus, we “fall short.” “Have sinned” is past. The present tense “fall short” means we continue to fall short “of the glory of God,” his moral glory. Once we sin, even once, we can never, on the basis of law keeping, sinless obedience, measure up to the divine standard. No amount of community service can earn a guilty killer innocence, and our sin has earned us the death penalty. We must depend on divine grace. You and I cannot be so good that we deserve heaven, because we have sinned.

The Basis of Justification

“being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed” (verses 24-25)

We are justified, declared to be righteous, free from guilt, “freely,” that is, “as a gift” (**NASB, ESV**). This doesn’t mean it is unconditional; it just means we don’t earn it. The apostle Peter promised his audience “the gift of the Holy Spirit” upon the conditions “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Reception of the Holy Spirit is a gift, but we must repent and be baptized to receive that gift. Nothing in repentance and baptism earns us the gift of the Holy Spirit, but they are essential conditions for receiving this divine gift. We cannot buy eternal salvation with silver and gold (1 Peter 1:17-19).

Rather, we have redemption, that is, we are ransomed from slavery to sin, in, in relationship to, Christ Jesus.

This is because God set Him forth as a propitiation, “a means of appeasing” (Thayer. 301), the judicial wrath of God. The one against whom we sinned paid the price for sin in our behalf. Behold, what love! What grace!

It was “by His blood.” One preacher said, “One drop of the blood of Christ could free the whole world from sin!” Why, then, didn’t He just prick His finger for us? There’s nothing intrinsically more valuable about the blood of Jesus than yours or mine. But, His blood is equivalent to His death for us (cf. Romans 5:9-10). His death on the cross provides a just basis on which the righteous God can declare guilty sinners not guilty.

The Means of Justification

“whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed” (Romans 3:25)

Our part in our own salvation is summarized by the word “faith.” It is through faith we appropriate the benefits of His blood. “Now faith is the substance (“assurance,” **NASB, ESV**) of things hoped for, the evidence (“conviction,” **NASB, ESV**) of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). The apostle begins and ends his inspired treatise on the gospel by declaring that the substance of that message is “the obedience of faith” (Romans 1:5; 16:26). Obedience to the faith and obedience that springs from faith is the expression of our faith that brings the salvation procured by the blood of the Son of God. In the waters of baptism we enter into Christ and receive the benefits of His blood - His death, burial, and resurrection on our behalf (Romans 6:3-4; 5:9-10).

(to be continued)



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