

everywhere and that His worship will not be confined either to the mountain in Samaria or in Jerusalem, but wherever the heart of man is lifted up to Him in sincerity and in truth. From this He goes on to the great words that "God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth," until at last He comes to that soul-thrilling truth that He is the Messiah. Or rather, by the contempla-

tion of these sublime doctrines she herself arrives at the truth and says "I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when He is come, He will tell us all things." Jesus saith unto her, "I that speak unto thee am He." What a wonderful example we have in this of the way in which to deal with an individual and to lead one from the small talk that might naturally arise between a weary traveler and a casual visitor of

the well to the sublime heights of the spiritual nature of God, His omnipresence, the living water that can satisfy the thirsty and the longing soul, and last of all, that the Desire of all hearts is here. O, that we might lift our conversation from the paltry themes that occupy so much of our time and thought and dwell more upon those great matters that pertain to eternity and the glory of God and the soul's need of salvation.

## Notes on Biblical Exposition

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### XIX. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

*"We are by nature Jews and not sinners of the Gentiles; but, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but only through faith in Christ Jesus, even we believed in Christ Jesus, in order that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified" (Gal. 2:15-16, in a literal translation).*

#### Not Even Jews Were Justified by Works

IN last month's issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY, we discussed the beginning of Paul's report of the speech which he made to Peter at Antioch. "If thou," Paul had said to Peter, "being a Jew, livest as the Gentiles do and not as do the Jews, how is it that thou art compelling the Gentiles to Judaize?" Peter himself did not on principle keep the ceremonial law; his principles led him to abandon it on occasion. Yet by the force of his example at Antioch he was leading the Gentile Christians to keep it. Such conduct was inconsistent. Surely a Jew, if anyone, would make it the principle of his life to keep the ceremonial law; and if even a Jew abandoned it, certainly it was unreasonable for him to lead the Gentiles to keep it.

This thought is developed further in the passage which we now consider.

"We," Paul said to Peter, "are by nature Jews and not sinners from among

the Gentiles. We Jews, if any men, would rely upon the law; unlike the Gentiles, we did not need to acquire whatever benefits the law conferred by abandoning our own people and by uniting voluntarily with the people of Israel; on the contrary, we were Jews *by nature*; we were not 'sinners,' in the old, Jewish sense of the word which divided men into the two classes of 'Jews' and 'sinners' and equated the Gentiles with the latter; we had, from our birth on, whatever righteousness the law could give."

"Yet we gave up all that," Paul continued in his address to Peter, "in order to obtain our salvation in exactly the same way as that in which it was obtained by those despised 'sinners' of the Gentiles." "But, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but only through faith in Christ Jesus, even we believed in Christ Jesus, in order that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified."

#### The Meaning of the Word "Justify"

Here we have the first occurrence in the Epistle to the Galatians of the momentous verb "to justify." Does that verb mean "to make righteous" or "to declare righteous"? At the very root of evangelical Christianity, as over

against the Roman Catholic view, is the conviction that the word means not "to make righteous" but "to declare righteous."

The question might seem to be settled (to say nothing of other passages) by Rom. 3:4, where, in a quotation from Ps. 51:4, God is said to be "justified"—"in order that Thou mightest be justified in Thy words and mightest prevail when Thou art judged." Obviously God cannot be "made righteous," but He can be "declared righteous" or "recognized as righteous." It is, therefore, surprising indeed to find Professor Edgar J. Goodspeed, in his "American Translation" of the New Testament, actually translating the word that means "justify" by "make upright"! It would be difficult to imagine a rendering which more completely fails to get the meaning of the Pauline word.

In saying so, we can appeal not merely to Protestant tradition, but to the overwhelming weight, it is safe to say, of modern opinion. Many modern scholars who are as far as possible from holding, for themselves, to Paul's doctrine of justification by faith do at least recognize the fact that it *was* Paul's doctrine; and it may no doubt be said that in his incorrect rendering of the word "justify" Professor Goodspeed is placing himself in opposition to modern grammatico-his-

torical exegesis just as much as to the very roots of the Christian faith.

Plainly, then, the word "justify" in Paul's Epistles means "declare righteous," "pronounce righteous," and not "make righteous." God's act in "justifying" the sinner is—if we may use a theological term—a "forensic" act. That is, it is an act that is analogous to the act of a judge in pronouncing a sentence of acquittal upon a prisoner at the bar.

### Justification and the "Modern Mind"

No doubt the entire forensic aspect of salvation, the entire question how a sinful man can become right with God, is highly distasteful to the "modern mind," as indeed it is distasteful to the unregenerate mind of sinful man in all ages. "We will have nothing to do," men say, "with these juridical notions of God, which represent God as a stern judge pronouncing sentence upon mankind; rather will we think of Him only as a loving Father and as the source of life."

The reason why the forensic aspect of salvation is so distasteful to the "modern mind" is perfectly plain. It is distasteful because it involves a profound view of sin as transgression of the law of God. Men no longer believe today in a law of God; the only law that they will recognize is a law that a man imposes upon himself. Sin they regard—if they are willing to use at all the antiquated word—as merely imperfection. They will have nothing to do with the idea of guilt. It is no wonder that they will not think of God as Judge.

But whatever modern men may think of the forensic aspect of salvation, it is perfectly clear that Paul thought a great deal of it. Modern men may not be interested in the question how a sinful man who has disobeyed God's command and come under the dreadful penalty of God's law may yet stand before God's judgment seat; but it is at least clear that Paul was supremely interested in it. In removing it from great passages in Paul's Epistles, by the translation of the word "justify" by the very modern expression "make upright," Professor Goodspeed is making the Epistles more palatable to modern men; but he is closing his eyes to what the Epistles really

contain. Whether we like it or not, the fact does remain that the Apostle Paul was supremely interested in the question how a sinful man can become right with God and that he answers that question by the great doctrine of justification by faith alone.

### Justification by Faith Alone

"Knowing," says Paul, "that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but only through faith in Christ Jesus . . ." The Greek phrase which we have here translated "but only" means, in itself, "if not" or "unless" or "except." Can we then translate it "unless" or "except" in this verse? Most assuredly we cannot do so. We should then make Paul say, "A man is not justified by the works of the law except through faith in Christ Jesus"; and that would mean that if a man has faith in Jesus to help the works of the law out, he can be justified by the works of the law after all; it would mean that, while a man is not justified by works alone, he is justified by works and faith taken together. Thus faith would become merely the means by which a man's works become effective for salvation.

But that was almost exactly the view of Paul's opponents, the Judaizers. Certainly, therefore, Paul cannot mean to give expression to it here as his own view; and indeed he contradicts it in the clearest possible way in the latter part of this very sentence, where he places being justified by the works of the law in sharp opposition to being justified by faith.

Evidently, therefore, Paul is here using the phrase meaning "if not" or "except" in the sense which we discussed in the October, 1931, number of *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*—the sense, namely, in which the phrase introduces an exception to a general proposition of which what has actually been expressed in the preceding sentence is merely one specific instance. Here the phrase introduces an exception to the general proposition, "A man is not justified at all"; and Paul means to say, "A man is not justified at all except through faith in Christ Jesus." But the general proposition is not actually expressed in what precedes; it is

merely implied in the specific instance of it that "a man is not justified by the works of the law." Luther, therefore, was quite justified in holding this passage to teach the doctrine of justification by faith *alone*.

"Even we," says Paul, "believed in Christ Jesus, in order that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified." It is not quite clear whether Paul has a specific Old Testament passage in mind in the last clause of this sentence, "because by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified." Possibly he is thinking of Ps. 143:2. But even if he has no specific Old Testament passage in mind, the Hebraistic phrase "no flesh" and the Hebraistic form of the sentence (which cannot be brought out in an English translation) show rather clearly that he is basing his proposition upon the whole teaching of the Old Testament. "You and I," said Paul to Peter, "believed in Christ Jesus, in order that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because in general the proposition stands firm on the basis of the Old Testament that no man is justified by the works of the law." If we ask how Paul showed in detail that the Old Testament teaches that general proposition, we need only turn to such a passage as Gal. 3:10-12.

## Editorial Notes and Comments (Concluded)

bear his penalty. The diseased man can not cure himself. Another, and one not dying from his disease, must give him of his blood and so of his life. Precisely thus, guilty human nature demands a supernatural redeemer, and corrupt human nature demands a supernatural regenerator and sanctifier. Our salvation in a word supposes a new start; and the possibility of this, whether for the race or the individual, is conditioned on such supernatural intervention. If, as observation and experience no less than Scripture testify, we are 'dead through trespasses and sins,' we can be quickened and raised up to heaven in the likeness of Christ only as God Himself reaches down from heaven and Himself lifts us up."

It can hardly be said too clearly or too frequently that Christianity de-supernaturalized is Christianity extinct.