

**Justification. The Heart of the Christian Faith**  
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Having written a brief item on this subject, I should like to continue with a further exploration on this basic doctrine of our Church.

The Old Testament tells us how God led the People of Israel out of Egypt and by his servant Moses he gave them his Law. This Law is summarized in the Ten Commandments and then later spoken as two basic Commandments as Jesus himself said: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this 'Love your neighbour as yourself'". (Mark12.28-33)

These Commandments expressed God's righteousness and they were given to reveal God's desire for a covenant relationship with his people. This relational concept was carried over from the Old Testament to the New Testament but with a difference that was seen in the way that Jesus proclaimed the Gospel of grace and forgiveness not by observing the Law by one's own merit, but by faith and trust in him. For this reason we learn that "...tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him". (Luke15.1).

At the heart of the Christian faith we are justified by God by personal acceptance of Jesus Christ and his death upon the cross. As St. Mark says "...the Son of Man came into the world to give his life as a ransom for many". (10.45). In Phil 3.11 St. Paul says "...that I may gain Christ and be found in him not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness of God that depends on faith".

Faith is not to be equated with mysticism neither with secret or private knowledge for by faith one gains wholeness, whereby one rejects one's own righteousness in order to receive God's gift of righteousness. We need to remember that this is a new permanent status of being.

There are two aspects of God's act of making us righteous.

It was Martin Luther who in the German Reformation observed that this gift was firstly conveyed in the active sense whereby God makes a person just, and then secondly in the passive sense when justification is received by the believer. This active and passive sense also applies to the 'glory' of God, for the glory with which God is glorified in us is active, but the glory with which we are glorified in him is passive. This distinction was recognized by Luther in the way St. Paul used Hebraisms. Although he wrote his letters to the churches in the Greek language he had, so to speak, a Hebrew mind. (2Cor11.22). God's 'righteousness' and 'glory' therefore express an invariable and unchangeable position in our relationship with God. This is important from the point of view of knowing that in Christ they are his gifts which characterize his compassion and love.

The second aspect of being justified by faith is seen in the way that God sustains our righteousness. St. John emphasized this position in spite of the sins that easily come our way. For in 1 John he speaks of overcoming sin by our personal walk with "Jesus

Christ the righteous". In 2v1 he says: "Should anyone sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous". There is forgiveness and restoration, but we must distinguish between acts of sin and continuous sinning when a person rejects the warnings of Scripture and of the Holy Spirit and when the conscience, that moral sense of right and wrong, is seared. This second aspect of our justification is seen in that God is consistent with his own nature in making us righteous. In other words, our identification with Jesus means that God must regard us as righteous in him. Our baptism into Christ is that outward sign of inward grace.

So, we may ask, what of the Law that God has given for St. Paul says "...the law is holy and the commandment just and good". The Law is still there for us to keep but with this difference. Before, it condemned us but now we live by the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus", (Roms8.2) as it is also promised in Psalm 40v8. "I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart".

God the Father and God the Son are equally bonded in the work of our redemption when Jesus took to himself the results of human ungodliness. There is no internal contradiction within the Trinity of God, for with the crucified Christ, God the Father was in complete concord when he sent his Son into the World to be our Saviour. (Jn3.16).

Therefore the righteousness of God is obviously a shared righteousness not only within the Godhead but also with each other, thereby placing the believer in the company of others. For this reason our righteousness in Christ becomes a creative power, in fact a new creation that serves within the community of the Church, and all for the glory of God.

Although we see things are slowly improving with the Coronavirus infection we may ask whether life will ever return to what we once enjoyed with family and friends. People are suffering the effects of grief and sorrow, isolation, unemployment and debt. Young people are deprived of education and friendships.

How does faith relate to what is happening? We may not be in a position to fathom the World's troubles of which this pandemic is part, for there are fellow Christians who are caught up in many other difficulties and dangers. Whatever dangers we face, Christians share a foundation not only of faith and the foundation of love but also the foundation of hope in God and in his coming kingdom. The foundation of hope in every form of suffering is our resurrection from the dead and in our eternal life in communion with God.

When we view the selflessness of Jesus in his words and works and supremely by his death on the cross, we may only interpret his coming to us as an act of divine love, love that is directed to all people. Our Justification and deliverance from sin has been accomplished by the Father who sent his Son; by the Son who entered this fearful world in the man Jesus, and by the Holy Spirit who empowered Jesus in the obedience and fulfilment of God's purposes in reconciling the world to himself.

Refs. 'Justification' Eberhard Jungel.  
Epistles of John. Tyndale Com. John Stott.

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