

Justification

by Sebastian R. Fama

Justification refers to the method by which we are made right with God. Since only those who are justified can enter heaven, it is important that we get this issue correct. Protestants claim that we are justified by faith alone. They say that all one has to do is to publicly proclaim their trust in Jesus as their Savior. Strict adherence to a list of do's and don'ts is not what salvation is all about, they claim. On the other hand, Catholics believe what Jesus said in Matthew 7:21: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, **but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.**"

In Romans 1:17, Paul tells us that, "**The just shall live by faith.**" The Catholic Church is in full agreement with this statement. However, she does not agree with the way some would define faith. The Church speaks of faith in the biblical sense. While Paul says, "the just shall live by faith," he also says, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but **faith working through love**" (Galatians 5:6). He further states, "If I have a faith that can move mountains, but **have not love, I am nothing...** And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. **But the greatest of these is love**" (1 Corinthians 13:2, 13). Why is the greatest of these love? Because without love there is no saving faith.

So then, how is love manifested? Well, in Romans 12:9-13 Paul says, "**Let love be genuine**, hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good, love one another with brotherly affection, outdo one another in showing honor. Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. **Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality.**"

In Romans 1:5 Paul speaks about the obedience of faith. He said: "Through him **we have received the grace of apostleship, to bring about the obedience of faith**, for the sake of his name, among all the Gentiles." For Paul, to have faith meant to take action. But didn't Paul say: "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1)? Yes, he did and as Jesus points out that is only true if we remain in Him (John 15:4). Paul expands on this in Romans 8:13 where he says: "**For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**" He also says: "For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, **but the doers of the law who will be justified**" (Romans 2:13).

When the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, "Men, what must I do to be saved?" Paul said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved" (Acts 16:30-31). Some take this to mean intellectual assent, but the Biblical concept of believing means to act in accordance with. Notice how Jesus answers the rich young man who asked, "Good Teacher, **what must I do to inherit eternal life?**" He said, "**You know the commandments...sell what you have and give to the poor**" (Mark 10:17-22). In Matthew 25:32-46, Jesus characterizes the saved as those who feed and clothe the poor and visit those in prison. He also characterizes the damned as those who refrain from such activities.

In Revelation 20:12 and 2 Corinthians 5:10 we are told that we will be judged by our deeds. Was the Apostle John in error when he wrote, "**And by this we may be sure that we know Him, if we keep His Commandments? He who says 'I know him' but disobeys His Commandments is a liar**, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps His word, in him truly love for God is perfected. **By this we may be sure that we are in Him**" (1 John 2:3-5). Finally, we are told in 1 John 3:23, "And **this is His commandment**, that we should **believe** in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and **love one another**, just as He has commanded us."

In Matthew 25:40, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." Reject your neighbor, and you reject Jesus! Does this mean that your good works will earn you salvation? No, not at all. As we saw earlier (Romans 8:13) all that we do, we do by the grace of God. Indeed, we cannot even say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3). So, our good works are actually accomplished by God working through us.

For the Christian there is no excuse for serious deliberate sin. "Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation **will also provide the way of escape** that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 12:13). Also: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His Commandments. And **His commandments are not burdensome**" (1 John 5:3). They are not burdensome because, once again, He enables us to obey them with His grace. As we are told in Hebrews 4:15-16, "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses...Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, **that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**"

In John 14:15-16 Jesus says: "If you love me you will keep my Commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Councilor, to be with you forever." In other words, you can keep the Commandments, because He is sending another Councilor (the Holy Spirit) who will give you the grace to accomplish it. This grace was the reason why Paul could say, "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). Certainly, avoiding serious sin is included in all things.

So, a failure to do good works is not a failure to earn one's salvation, but a rejection of grace which is ultimately a denial of the power of the Holy Spirit, and that is the "unforgivable sin" (Mark 3:28). It is unforgivable because it is a rejection of Christ. Good works are not something in addition to faith, but the proof that faith exists. The good works in question do not constitute "works salvation" because they were not produced by something within the individual but were in fact accomplished by the grace of God, which is a gift.

Clement, the fourth Bishop of Rome, writing around the year 95, wrote about the connection between grace and works and the need for our cooperation with grace. He wrote, "**Let us therefore join with those to whom grace is given by God.** Let us clothe ourselves in concord, being humble and self-controlled, keeping ourselves far from all backbiting and slander, **being justified by works and not by words...**Why was our father Abraham blessed? **Was it not because of his deeds of justice and truth, wrought in faith?** ... So, we, having been called through His will in Christ Jesus, were **not justified through ourselves** or through our own wisdom or understanding or piety or works which we wrought in holiness of heart, **but through faith, whereby the almighty God justified all men**" (1 Clement 30:3, 31:2, 32:3-4).

As for the sacraments, they are occasions of grace and not rituals that must be performed to earn salvation. The grace received enables us to accept our salvation and to live the Christian life. This is reflected in Jesus' statement concerning the Eucharist in John 6:56. He said, "**Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.**" It is only by the grace of God that we accept Christ in the first place and it is only by the grace of God that we remain in Him. This is what the Church calls Sanctifying Grace. Besides Sanctifying Grace, every sacrament produces Sacramental Grace. Sacramental grace is a special grace that helps in the fulfillment of the duties related to a particular sacrament. For example, in the sacrament of Matrimony, the Sacramental Grace received can enable the couple to be the husband and wife that God would have them be. All of the sacraments were instituted by Christ and can be found in Scripture:

Baptism – John 3:5, Matthew 28:18-19

Confirmation – Acts 8:14-17

Reconciliation / Confession – John 20:21-23

The Eucharist – Matthew 26:26-28, John 6:53-55

Matrimony – Matthew 19:5-6

Holy Orders – Titus 1:5

Sacrament of the Sick – James 5:14-15

I can understand the appeal of the Protestant doctrine of Justification. However, just because an idea is appealing it doesn't mean that it is true. I absolutely love the idea that eating sugary and fatty foods will help me lose weight and improve my health. However, I am pretty sure that there is no truth to it.