
Delivered From This Present Evil World

By David Wilkerson

March 25, 1996 I believe that justification by faith is the foundational truth of Christianity. You can't know true rest and peace until you are convinced you can never be made right in God's eyes by your own works of righteousness.

If you don't understand the perfect righteousness of Christ that is yours by faith, you'll lead a life of toil and sweat. You'll spend your days trying to please God through some kind of legalistic, hopeless attempt to establish your own righteousness. But the truth is, you'll never have any righteousness to bring to the Lord!

No doubt you're familiar with the passage in Isaiah that says all our righteousness is as filthy rags in God's sight. This doesn't mean God despises our good works - not at all. God does want our righteous acts, and we should do good works. But if you think your good works merit your salvation - that they allow you to stand holy before God - then they are nothing but filthy rags. You are headed for shipwreck!

Of course, you may feel good because of the good works you do. You will probably enjoy a moment of victory whenever you resist temptation. And there probably are days when you think you have overcome one of your pet passions. You feel righteous, that God's favor is on you.

But the next day you fail - you fall back into a sin - and suddenly you lose all your joy. You think the Lord is angry with you. You wonder if you have lost your salvation. You think, "I'll never make it" - and you end up hiding from God!

It is a roller-coaster ride of emotional highs and lows - of up-and-down, hot-and-cold, sin-and-confess-and-sin-and-confess - according to how good or bad you think you have been on any particular day. It's a life of misery - because you're trying to please God in your flesh!

Beloved, no righteousness of the flesh will ever stand before God. Even the best people among us - the most moral, godly saints - have all failed miserably and fallen short of God's glory. None of us can ever be accepted in the Father's eyes by our good works. We are accepted by Him only as we are in Christ!

"...for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). When we turn to Jesus with saving, self-emptying faith, we become one in Christ. Being "in Christ" means God credits Jesus' righteousness to us. All our sins are washed away because of His work, not ours!

Furthermore, we not only are one in Him, but we are complete in Him as well. At the Cross our old man - with all its fleshly lusts and desires, all its self-righteousness, all its strivings - was done away with in God's eyes. God said, "I am finished with the old man. He is nailed to the Cross. From now on, only one Man can stand before Me - a perfectly righteous Man - Jesus Christ. And all who are one in Him are forgiven, accepted - counted as righteous in My sight!"

Unless You Grasp This Foundational Truth, You Cannot Overcome in These Last Days! We are justified, made right in God's sight, by our faith in the work Jesus did on the Cross. You see, God accepts nothing less than perfect righteousness. And there is only one perfect righteousness - the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Only He perfectly fulfilled all the demands of the law. Only He satisfied the justice of God regarding sin.

I thank God for all good, clean, moral, faithful people in the body of Christ - folks who don't cheat, lie, steal, drink, smoke, use drugs, gamble, ogle pornography or gossip. All Christians ought to live this way.

But none of these things will stand on Judgment Day! We can't count on any of them to obtain favor or acceptance with God. Yet, sadly, millions of people think they'll stand before God on the goodness of their lives. No! We all have to understand this truth: We can be justified only by faith in the work Jesus has done on the Cross!

Having said that, however, let me tell you the rest of the story. If you go no further than justification by faith - if your doctrine ends at saying, "I am made the righteousness of Christ by faith" - then you are in grave danger!

Here is where many Christians fail. They say, "I am the righteousness of Christ!" No! We are not the righteousness of Christ. We have had the righteousness of Christ reckoned to us! We have no righteousness in ourselves; there is no good thing in us.

The perfect righteousness of Christ is not infused or poured into us. Rather, we are accounted righteous in God's eyes because of Jesus. Christ's righteousness is credited to our account! God imputes the righteousness of Christ to us.

This righteousness is not something that is in us. Rather, it is only in Christ. Yet when God looks at us, He sees us only as being in Christ - as perfectly righteous!

When Paul First Preached Justification by Faith, He Was Falsely Accused of Preaching a Permissive Gospel! As the apostle Paul preached this revelation of being justified by the perfect righteousness of Christ, it was said he was preaching a permissive lifestyle. People pointed out that if we are saved, forgiven, accepted and accounted righteous all by faith in Christ, then we all should go out and sin more. The reasoning was, "God can show forth even more grace - and He will get even more glory!"

Paul cried, "That's slander! It's not what I'm saying at all." In later years, the truth he preached became further perverted by many who used it as an excuse to continue in sin. Out of this came a doctrine called antinomianism. This word means, literally, "anti-law," or, "without restraint." It is a doctrine with no restrictions.

The exponents of antinomianism value being free in Christ. They say, "I have complete liberty in Christ! I have no bondage, no guilt, no condemnation - because Jesus paid it all for me. He is my satisfaction with God, so that now the Father sees only Jesus when He looks at me. I am safe, eternally saved - so I can do as I please!"

One of the leading theologians of the doctrine of antinomianism was a man named Dr. Crisp. Following are some passages from the heart of his doctrine:

"God's love is not at all dependent upon anything in me, so that love will never vary on account of my sinning; and for this reason, when I sin, suppose by adultery or murder, God ever considers me as one with His own Son, who has fulfilled all righteousness for me. And as He is 'always well pleased' with Him, so with me, for I am 'bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh.'

"There are no lengths, then, I may not run, nor any depths I may not fall into, without displeasing

Him; as David did, who in spite of his repeated backslidings did not lose his character as a man after God's heart. I may murder with him, I may worship Ashtaroth with Solomon, deny Christ with Peter, rob with Onesimus, commit incest with the Corinthians, without forfeiting either the divine favor or the kingdom of God....

"Jesus Christ by one offering 'perfected' me - who am 'sanctified' in all my sins. In Him I am complete in all my iniquities.... I believe God will overrule my sin, whether it be adultery, murder, or incest, for His glory and my good...."

The doctrine of antinomianism sounds abhorrent to any true believer. Yet Christianity today is rife with people living in this very kind of "fool's paradise." They claim they are made the righteousness of Christ. They boast they are eternally redeemed. Yet they have never forsaken their sins!

They drink, smoke, carouse, sleep around - and all the while they say, "I'm saved, because Jesus is my righteousness! It's all settled by faith. So it doesn't matter what I do." Yet such people are enslaved to their old corruptions. They are still "of the world" - living in pleasure, polluted by the spirit of this age, blinded and deceived by sin.

Indeed, many Christians hear grace preaching - sermons on the perfect righteousness of Christ that is available by faith - and yet it gives them a false sense of comfort! They continue in their sin, telling themselves, "Maybe my sin is not so bad. Maybe Jesus is my righteousness to the point that God will overlook it!"

No! Such people have done despite to the grace of God. Paul says they have abused the message of grace!

There Is Always a Risk in Preaching a Message of Grace!The risk in preaching grace is that people will abuse it, as they did with Paul - slanderously reporting that the more we sin, the more God's grace can be manifested among us. Such a doctrine is dangerous, because it omits something vital - something central to the gospel!

Let me give you the heart of the true grace message: It is not a permissive gospel - but one that teaches holiness!

"For that grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:11-13).

According to Paul, we are not walking in grace until we have broken from worldly corruptions. Unless we are endeavoring through the power of the Holy Spirit to lead godly and righteous lives, looking for the Lord's coming in our every waking moment, then we do not know God's grace!

The majority of Christians want forgiveness - but that's all. They don't want to be delivered from this present world, because they love it. They are attached to their sins, not wanting to give up the pleasures of this earth. So they cling to a doctrine that says, "I can live as I please - as long as I say, 'I believe!'"

They don't want to hear about obedience, repentance, self-denial, picking up their cross, taking on

the yoke or burden of Christ. They would rather live in this world without restraint, thinking they have a Savior who will forgive them in the end.

They want simply to be excused on Judgment Day - to have all their iniquities overlooked. They expect Jesus to open up the pearly gates, put His arms around them and lead them down a golden street to their reserved mansion - even though they've never broken from the spirit of this world!

Paul writes, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:2). We are to break from this world completely and be conformed to Christ alone!

You see, Jesus justifies us through faith for a purpose: It is to embolden and empower us to resist the devil and overcome the world, in the power of God's Spirit. Yes, Jesus died for us so that we could have eternal life; that is truly wonderful. But He also died so we could enjoy deliverance in and from this present evil world!

"...Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father" (Galatians 1:4).

"Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14).

There Is a Complex Theological Problem That Has Divided Christianity for Centuries. A centuries-old theological question still rages today. That is: "What is God's part in our salvation, and what is our part?" It is a question of faith versus works.

One school of thought, called Calvinism, says Christ has done a finished work, so that no further work is required. The other camp, called Arminianism, says we are justified so that we may do good works through the power of the Holy Spirit.

One camp quotes Galatians, stating, "Paul says the gospel is by faith alone, without works." The other camp points to James, saying, "James states faith without works is dead. We're to give evidence of our faith in our actions!"

In truth, both of these positions are right. There is no contradiction between them. Here is what is really being said:

1. Works will not justify or earn salvation for anyone.
2. Those who are zealous to do good works prove they have the kind of faith that justifies.

These are both wonderful, life-giving, scriptural truths about the nature of faith.

Yet, the fact is, not all faith justifies. Not all faith is a faith that saves. Let me explain.

Since Times Square Church was founded nine years ago, thousands have walked down the aisles here, stood at the altar, prayed a sinner's prayer and said, "Lord, I believe. Save me!" But the majority of them went back to their seats and back to their homes unsaved! They returned in the same condition in which they came.

Many Christians say they believe in justification by faith. Yet merely saying the words, "I believe," does not justify them. After all, the Bible says the devils believe and tremble. Such people have not brought to the Lord a saving, genuine faith.

If you were to go into the streets and ask people at random, "Do you believe Jesus was the Son of God? that He came to this earth to minister? that He was crucified and resurrected?", the vast majority of people would answer, "Yes - I believe all of that." But they are not saved! Merely giving mental assent to those things does not constitute a saving faith. It is not a faith that justifies!

The church of Jesus Christ desperately needs some plain talk about faith. We simply are too glib about it. We offer faith to people who are not ready for it. We present it as if it were a first installment on a new car. In doing this, we downgrade faith to something no more valuable than a prize in a box of Cracker Jacks!

The church's concept of faith has been corrupted by our American culture. People in this country have been feeding on a demonic gospel of self-esteem, self-worth, self-help. We've been told, "Believe in yourself." Then add to that our obsession with "instant everything" - instant meals, instant drinks, instant information, instant gratification.

Now, in turn, churches offer a demonic diet of self-will and trusting in self. Preachers say, "Just give mental assent to God's promises. You'll get instant heaven, instant holiness, instant happiness!"

This has produced a temporary, false faith. People today are running to God's altar with no real conviction, saying, "Jesus save me. I believe!" But they don't have true faith. What they have is presumption!

You Cannot Trust in God Until You Quit Trusting in Yourself! Paul did not speak of having faith until he had lost all confidence in his flesh. He took all that he knew - all his education, self-confidence, abilities, doctrines and zeal - and cast them aside as dung! He spoke of faith only after he had said, "I have no confidence in my flesh!"

The same is true for us! We don't have saving faith until we come to the end of believing that someone or something other than Jesus can save us. Before anyone is capable of true faith, he must come to a sense of how lost, helpless and utterly hopeless he is.

You may object, saying, "Almost every time Jesus performed a miracle, He told people, 'Only believe!'" Yet in each instance He said this to people who had come to the end of all hope - who had lost faith in everything else. This includes the father whose son was cast into the fire by demons. It also includes Jairus, whose twelve-year-old daughter had died. Their faith was born out of the knowledge that nothing else in the world was any use. They had committed everything to Christ, crying out in faith, "Jesus, You are my only hope. If You don't do it, it can't be done!"

Yet saving, justifying faith involves more than giving up all confidence in the flesh. It also involves submitting your whole life to Christ with all your heart. It includes a repentance that says, "Jesus, I've got nothing to offer You. I am nothing and I have nothing. I come to submit to Your Lordship!"

In Romans 10:9, Paul characterizes saving faith as believing with your heart and confessing with your mouth. He's saying that faith is more than merely giving mental assent. Rather, it is submitting your whole life to Him - with all your heart!

In Acts 8:37, Philip said to the eunuch, "...If thou believest with all thine heart..." The eunuch replied, "...I believe..." (same verse) - and he was saved! This was not simply a mental "yes" to Jesus by the eunuch. It was a full surrendering of his will - a committing of his very life and future into the Lord's hands. He believed with all his heart!

In contrast, Simon Magus believed Paul's preaching. Yet he had only a temporary faith, because his heart was not in it. Scripture says he still clung to bitterness! (see Acts 8:13). Indeed, multitudes of people in Jesus' day believed temporarily in the name of Christ. But Jesus would not commit Himself to them because He knew their hearts were not committed to Him (see John 2:23-24).

So, you ask, who is truly justified by faith? Who has Christ's perfect righteousness credited to him? Who is seen as holy before God?

It is the one who has come to the end of all human help - who knows he is lost and helpless! This person has tried everything and failed. And now he has committed his whole life into the Lord's hands - with all his heart, mind, soul and strength. He cries out, "Lord, I am Yours - take all of me! I want to be delivered from all my sins. I want to live the Christ-life. Lord, You are my only hope!"

There Is One Other Important Aspect of Saving, Justifying Faith! The strongest feature of true, saving faith is a desire to draw closer to Him who loves you! "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God..." (1 Peter 3:18).

Why did Jesus suffer and die? Why did He provide justification for us? Why is His perfect righteousness accounted to us?

It was that He might bring us to God! It's all about intimate fellowship with the Father. You see, saving faith has in it a heart-cry: "Oh God, draw me nearer to You!" And unless you have this as a part of your faith, it cannot be saving faith. When you come to Jesus, it has to be about something more than just wanting happiness in life. Something in your heart - put there by the Spirit - must say, "I want to know Him who loves me. I want to know the One who gave His Son to die for me. I want to be drawn closer to the Lord!" There is a drawing power in saving faith.

When Adam sinned, he lost the most precious thing any man or woman could possess: intimacy with God. Sin drove Adam away from closeness with the Father - and he actually hid from His presence. And ever since then, whenever man sins, he has a tendency to run and hide like his forefather, Adam.

This is why God so hates sin - because it robs us of His fellowship! He created us for this very reason - for intimacy with Him. And He so yearned for our fellowship that He sent His own Son to die on a cross, to justify us and tear down the walls that blocked that intimacy from taking place.

That is the power of justification - the glory of Christ's perfect righteousness imputed: It made a way back to God's original purpose in creating man - for fellowship with the Father!

This present world is full of evil, slander, satanic lies, seductions, guilt, fear, condemnation - all of it designed by Satan to keep us feeling unholy, unworthy to come into God's presence. The devil would have us hide as did Adam - to keep us from intimacy with God!

But we have been delivered from all that. We have a right to God's presence - an invitation to His throne - because we stand with a perfect righteousness before Him! Our heavenly Father is not willing

that anything stand between us and Him. Because we wear the cloak of Jesus' righteousness, nothing can keep us from the Father's saving grace!

Yet not only has God invited us to the throne of grace, but He accepts us as being holy in Christ. Our sin is under the blood, forgiven - and now we have a right into His holiness. Moreover, if we have come to Jesus with saving faith, then we have yielded all to Him. And something in our hearts constantly yearns after Him.

Beloved, Jesus didn't die just to take you to paradise. He died so that every day you could live in beautiful, close fellowship with the Father. You can talk to Him, listen to Him, ask Him to lead you, guide you, tell you where you're wrong, convict you of sin - because He abides in you by His Spirit!

To be delivered from this present evil world means simply this:

- He delivered us from the power, guilt and condemnation of sin.
- He delivered us from the condemnation of an accusing conscience.
- He atoned for every sin, robbing Satan of all accusations against us.
- He buried our sins in a sea of forgetfulness, nailing everything against us to the Cross.
- He rent the veil in two - opening up to us the Holy of holies, a way for us to come in to Him and for Him to come out to us.

You don't need to understand deep theology - Calvinism, Arminianism, antinomianism or any other theological concept to accept this truth. You don't need a four-year Bible college education. All you need is a faith that yearns to know Him in whom you have believed - and a hunger in your heart for Him! Amen!