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THE OUTWARD WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

By David Wheaton

Sanctification provides the evidence of our justification

This is a claim where Paul and James (sometimes thought to be contradictory) are in fact in agreement. Both are saying in different ways and to answer different arguments that a man can only be justified in God's sight by faith – accepting in humble gratitude the atoning death of the Lord Jesus for his sins.

In the Second Part of the Sermon of Salvation in the Book of Homilies, we read:

‘But this saying, that we be justified by faith only, freely, and without works, is spoken for to take away clearly all merit of our works, as being unable to deserve our justification at God's hands, and thereby most plainly to express the weakness of man, and the goodness of God; the great infirmity of ourselves, and the might and power of God; the imperfectness of our own works, and the most abundant grace of our Saviour Christ; and therefore wholly to ascribe the merit and deserving of our justification unto Christ only, and his most precious blood-shedding. This faith the holy Scripture teacheth us; this is the strong rock and foundation of Christian religion; this doctrine all old and ancient authors of Christ's church do approve; this doctrine advanceth and setteth forth the true glory of Christ, and beateth down the vain-glory of man; this whosoever denieth, is not to be accounted for a Christian man, nor for a setter forth of Christ's glory; but for an adversary to Christ and his Gospel, and for a setter forth of men's vain-glory.’

If that faith is a genuine response to Christ's work then there must be the evidence of the Spirit at work. James 2:21, 22 argues that the genuineness of the faith was evidenced by the obedience of the works: we note that v.23 took place at least 14 years, probably more like 20 years or more before the event referred to in v.21. Verse 24 is no contradiction of Paul: the context of v.19 shows faith is here in intellectual assent without that saving trust which is the gift of God. James says a man is shown to be justified by what he does and not by faith alone. This is the very point made earlier by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 7:15,21.

Commenting on James 2:14 Alec Motyer, *The Message of James*, (Bible Speaks Today series), IVP, Leicester, 1985 p.109, takes up a point made in another recent commentary by Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James*, (New International Greek Testament Commentary), Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1982, ‘it is only broadly correct to say (with Peter Davids) that “James does not argue for faith instead of works or works instead of faith or even works above faith but for faith and works”. Put like this, the priority and centrality of faith in the teaching of James is not safeguarded. After all, in verse 17 it is faith which possesses (has) works; in verse 22 it is faith which is the dominant partner in its colleague-relationship with works. We must say, therefore, not “faith and works”, but “faith productive of works.”’

This is a different understanding of the relationship between faith and works from that held by the church of Rome. Peter Toon, *What's the Difference*, Marshalls, Basingstoke, 1983, pp. 85-6, quotes the Council of Trent's rulings in an area which has not even been mentioned so far in the reports of ARCIC:

‘Justification, . . . is the process of becoming just and is thus to be increased within the faithful. They, through the observance of the commandments of God and of the Church, faith co-operating with good works, increase in that justice which they have received through the grace of Christ, and are still further justified.’

The need to keep God's commandments continually is emphasised in chapter eleven. 'Whoso are the sons of God love Christ; but they who love him keep his commandments... which assuredly with the divine help they can do.' Those who persist will never be forsaken by God; 'for God forsakes not those who have been once justified by his grace, unless he be first forsaken by them.' It is a rash presumption, however, as chapter twelve declares, for a Christian to presume that he is surely one of the elect. In fact, as chapter thirteen makes clear, perseverance is a gift of God and so 'let those who think themselves to stand, take heed lest they fall, and, with fear and trembling work out their salvation in labours, in watchings, in almsdeeds, in prayers and oblations, in fastings and chastity...' The final chapter describes the merit of good works. 'Life eternal is to be proposed to those working well unto the end and hoping in God, both as a grace mercifully promised to the sons of God through Jesus Christ, and as a reward which is according to the promise of God himself to be faithfully rendered to their good works and merits.' And it continues:

For, whereas Jesus Christ himself continually infuses his virtue into the said justified, – as the head into the members, and the vine into the branches, – and this virtue always precedes and accompanies and follows their good works, which without it could not in any wise be pleasing and meritorious before God, – we must believe that nothing further is wanting to the justified, to prevent their being accounted to have, by those very works which have been done in God, fully satisfied the divine law according to the state of this life, and to have truly merited eternal life, to be obtained also in its (due) time, if so be, however, that they depart in grace.

By contrast, Richard Hooker shows how the Church of England has always followed (to this day!) a distinction between the righteousness of justification and that of sanctification: see his *Learned Discourse of Justification* quoted in Peter Toon, *Justification and Sanctification*, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, London, 1983, pp. 94-5:

There are two kinds of Christian righteousness: the one without us, which we have by imputation; the other in us, which consisteth of faith, hope, charity, and other Christian virtues; and St. James doth prove that Abraham had not only the one, because the thing he believed was imputed unto him for righteousness; but also the other, because he offered up his son. God giveth us both the one justice and the other: the one by accepting us for righteous in Christ; the other by working Christian righteousness in us. The proper and most immediate efficient cause in us of this latter, is, the spirit of adoption which we have received into our hearts.

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