Justification By Faith

I. Definitions.
- A. justified: Made just or right; made or accounted righteous; warranted; supported by evidence.
- B. justify: (In Theology) To absolve, acquit, exculpate; to declare free from the penalty of sin on the basis of Christ's righteousness.
- C. justify: To prove the righteousness of a person or action, to show to be just.
  1. See this sense of *justify* in **PSA 51:4; LUK 7:29; 1TI 3:16.**
  2. In these texts, the Bible is not teaching that God and Christ needed to be acquitted of a charge of sin.
- D. faith: Belief, trust, confidence.
- E. faithful: Of persons, their actions, etc.: Full of or characterized by faith

II. The subject of justification has ignited much debate over the years.
- A. Are sinners absolved of sin's penalty through their good works (as Catholicism advocates)?
- B. Are sinners absolved of sin's penalty through their exercised faith (as Arminians or Calvinists advocate)?
- C. What is the time-relationship of justification (i.e., in the sense of absolution from sin's penalty) to man's faith: before? coincidental? after?
- D. Who or what is the operative power that causes the absolution?

III. Where Scripture is dealing with the hopelessness of man before God's law because of man's depravity, it declares how God has provided a righteousness and redemption in Jesus Christ. **ROM 3:19-26.**
- A. This sense of justification is clearly dealing with the freeing of sinners from the guilt and penalty of sin.
- B. This provided righteousness and redemption is for the benefit of those chosen in Christ before the world began. **EPH 1:4-7; ROM 8:30.**
- C. "Therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight..." (**ROM 3:20**). Absolution and acquittal of the charge of sin does NOT come by sinners' obedience of law. c/w **GAL 3:10.**
- D. Paul similarly warned the Galatians against relying on sinners' works for justification in this sense, underscoring that which does accomplish it. **GAL 2:16.**
- E. **ROM 3:22** and **GAL 2:16** are close parallels which point us to the source of eternal justification: the faith of Jesus Christ.

IV. The expression "by the faith of Jesus Christ" is commonly interpreted as meaning the faith that a sinner places in Christ upon hearing the gospel (a position which many modern Bible versions accommodate by altering the text to "by faith IN Jesus Christ").
- A. So, it is alleged that as a result of the exercise of the sinner's faith, Christ's righteousness is given or imputed to him, absolving him of sin's guilt and penalty.
- B. Arminianism holds that this exercise of faith is a power that the sinner has within himself.
- C. Calvinism generally holds that this faith is produced in the sinner by Jesus Christ.
- D. But BOTH systems affirm that "the faith of Christ" is the faith which the sinner exercises and is indispensable to absolution.
- E. A Calvinistic Baptist confession, The Philadelphia Confession of Faith, says, "Faith thus receiving and resting on Christ, and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification..."

1. Faith is not here deemed the *cause* of justification, but the *instrument.*
2. Faith is said to be to justification what eating is to food. As food sustains life, but cannot do so unless eaten, so Christ's righteousness justifies, but not without the sinner's believing.
    a. But food could not sustain life if there were not already life in the partaker.
    b. Life must exist before food can benefit it. Eternal life and justification must be already in place before human faith can be exercised.

V. Another explanation is that the expression, "faith of Christ" may simply denote the obvious: the faith (belief, trust, confidence) that Jesus Christ personally possessed and exercised.
A. Jesus Christ DID personally possess faith and exercise it.
HEB 2:13; MAT 27:43; REV 1:5; HEB 11:6 c/w JOH 8:29.
B. He trusted fully the scriptures which promised that the Father would not leave his soul in hell nor his body in a grave. **ACT 2:25-28.**
C. By HIS faith the righteousness of God was provided by which sinners are justified.
D. It is by HIS faithful obedience that sinners are freed from the guilt and condemnation of their sins and made righteous. **ROM 5:19.**
E. This is justification "by the faith of Christ."

VI. On several counts, it may be demonstrated that the faith which produces the justification of a condemned person cannot be that of the sinner.
A. If a person truly believes in Jesus Christ, he IS justified. **ACT 13:39.**
1. **ROM 3:22** declares that at the time a person is believing, the righteousness of God is both UNTO him and UPON him.
2. Therefore it is not a matter of the sinner believing and then getting righteousness.
B. Believing the gospel is an act of obedience. **ROM 10:16; 1JO 3:23.**
1. Remember that justification means being declared free from the penalty of sin on the basis of Christ's righteousness. His righteousness is provided to the sinner.
2. **ROM 5:19** declares that this righteousness is *by the obedience of One*.
3. Thus, both the Arminian and Calvinist schemes have a problem: they both make justification to hinge upon the obedience of the sinner. This is righteousness by the obedience of TWO, not One!
4. Further, the sinner cannot exercise his faith, be it of his own will (Arminianism) or produced in him (Calvinism) until he hears the gospel. **ROM 10:14.**
5. Thus, a third party's obedience is required: the preacher's. This is justification and righteousness by the obedience of THREE.
6. But if the term "faith of Jesus Christ" simply means HIS personal faithfulness which won righteousness for sinners, all fits together nicely.
C. Justification (absolution, acquittal) is not by the deeds or works of the law.
ROM 3:20; GAL 2:16.
1. But sinners' faith in God was required by the law. **MAT 23:23; PSA 78:21-22, 32**.
2. Men were even held accountable for not believing the gospel! **HEB 3:17-4:2.**
3. Thus, if eternal justification is by the sinner's belief of the gospel, Scripture is contradictory. But it is not. **2PE 1:20; PRO 8:8.**
D. The account of Cornelius' conversion deserves consideration. **ACT 10.**
1. Cornelius did not hear and believe the gospel until Peter took it to him. **ACT 15:7.**
2. Cornelius was working righteousness *before* Peter got there, so showing his acceptance with God. **ACT 10:1-2, 35.**
3. The person who truly works righteousness IS born of God and IS righteous in

God's eyes. **1JO 2:29; 3:7.**

4. If a person is declared righteous, by definition he IS justified, i.e., cleared from the guilt and penalty of sin. Perhaps this is what God was trying to get across to Peter before he went to Cornelius. **ACT 10:15.**
5. Cornelius was, prior to conversion, a righteous Gentile who had not yet heard the gospel.
   a. Of such, Paul says they show "...the work of the law written in their hearts" (**ROM 2:13-15**).
   b. Cornelius worked righteousness from an inward principle which had been written in his heart BEFORE Peter arrived with the gospel.
   c. Cornelius by his works of righteousness MANIFESTED that he was righteous; and if righteous, he was justified.
   d. Thus, his faith in Christ which came later could have been neither the cause nor the instrument of his justification.
   e. However, if this justification was produced by the faith of Christ, and not that of Cornelius, then all fits neatly together.
6. Cornelius needed to hear about Jesus Christ, Whose faith justified him. He could then identify with, and exercise his own faith in Christ as his sufficiency, thus showing himself beyond any doubt be to be just.

VII. (**ROM 3:25**) Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

A. "through faith in his blood" is an adverbial phrase modifying the verb phrase "hath set forth."
B. The only performing noun in the verse is "God" Who does the setting forth of Christ to be a propitiation.
C. The grammatical analysis of the text shows "through faith in his blood" to be modifying God's action. It thus refers to God, to His faith.
D. If it be thought objectionable to assert that God exercises faith, consider **ROM 3:3.**
   1. God is many times referred to as being faithful. e.g. **1CO 1:9, 10:13.**
   2. Remember that the primary definition of *faithful* is "full of faith."
E. When Paul concludes his line of thought in **ROM 3:19-28**, he asserts that justification is by "...faith without the deeds of the law."
   1. The context shows that this faith is the faith of Christ Himself as well as God's faith in Christ's blood for propitiation.
   2. Thus, justification is wholly in the hands of the Godhead and independent of the sinner's works and responses.
   3. Truly it is said that sinners are "...justified FREELY by his GRACE" (**v. 24**).

VIII. Remember that *justify* may also mean "to prove the righteousness of a person or action, to show to be just."

A. This helps to reconcile an apparent contradiction between **ROM 4:2-3** and **JAM 2:21-24**.
B. Abraham was NOT justified by anything he did, including his belief, in the sense of being absolved of the guilt and penalty of sin. His faith was evidence, a token: it was "counted unto him for righteousness." It was a witness that he was righteous. c/w **HEB 11:4**.
C. Abraham WAS justified by his works in the sense that his works proved that he and his faith were righteous and just.
D. Every act of faith and obedience performed by a child of God is more to his account *proving* that he has been justified (absolved) by the faith of Jesus Christ.

1. This is what Paul had in mind in **GAL 2:16.**
2. It is not that Paul thought to *procure* absolution by his believing. Rather, he sought to gain valid proof or evidence that he was justified by the faith of Christ through not trusting in his own merits of the works of the law. c/w **PHIL 3:9.**