



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 175

Justifying faith is imperfect – When we first believe, though our faith is real, it is small, weak and immature, which grows over our lifetime. We see this in the life of Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 16; 17:17); Zacharias (Luke 1:19-20); and the father of the demon-possessed son who told Jesus, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). We see this also in the lives of the apostles who in Luke 17:5 told Jesus, “Increase our faith!” This truth clearly demonstrates that our justification could in no way be grounded upon our faith or anything we do, for such things will continue to be mixed with doubt, unbelief and sin, and thus our justification would fluctuate from moment to moment. But praise God that our justification does not fluctuate, and was perfect and complete the moment we believed in Christ, and will remain so throughout our life, for it is grounded in Christ, who alone is perfect and faithful. Contrary to other views, we are declared just the moment we trust in Christ, and not when we are actually made just.

When we believed in Christ, all of our sins, past, present and future were forgiven by God (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 10:12-14), and we will never fall from the state of justification (John 10:28; Hebrews 12:2); nevertheless, in this life we will sin, and though this will not affect our justification, it will strain or impair our fellowship with Him, where we grieve the Spirit and suffer the displeasure and discipline of God (Job 5:17-18; Ephesians 4:30; Hebrews 12:5-11). The answer to this is to regularly confess and repent of our sins (Psalm 32:5; Matthew 6:12; 1 John 1:8-9; 2:1-2; WCF 11:5).

Justified in time – The next point we need to consider is that though from all eternity God had decreed to justify the elect (Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:3-5; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Peter 1:2), and though Christ did come and accomplish the work of salvation in history (Galatians 4:4; 1 Peter 1:20-21), the elect are only justified when the Holy Spirit applies the work of Christ unto them (Acts 16:31; Romans 10:13). We did not come into this world in a justified state, and before we believed in Christ we were under God’s wrath (Romans 6:17-18; Ephesians 2:1-5, 8; Colossians 1:21-23). Only when we believe in Christ are the benefits of His work realized in our lives (Romans 5:1; 8:1; Titus 3:4-7; WCF 11:4).

All believers are justified in the same way – Believers in the Old Testament were justified in the same manner as believers in the New Testament (WCF 11:6). Though there were administrative and temporal differences in the different periods of redemptive history, people in both Testaments were saved and are being saved in the one and same way, under the same covenant of grace, for the grounds of their salvation is one and the same, the perfect work of Christ alone, and the way of receiving this is one and the same, through faith alone. Even though God accepted animal sacrifices in the Old Testament, people were not saved through these or through the keeping of the law (Hebrews 9:9; 10:1, 4); for these could not satisfy the justice of God. Rather, Paul in Romans 3:25 states that “in His divine forbearance [God] had passed over former sins,” and He did this in view of the fact that His Son would in the future offer the perfect atonement, vindicate His righteousness, and satisfy His justice (Hebrews 10:11-12).

The people in the Old Testament heard the same gospel, which was proclaimed to Adam and Eve in the garden after the fall (Genesis 3:15), the same gospel which Abraham heard (Galatians 3:8), and the same gospel which Moses and the prophets heard (John 5:46; Luke 24:27; Acts 26:22-23). Thus people in the Old Testament were saved when they trusted in the promised Messiah (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:1-3, 22-25). Though there are many religions in the world, in reality these can all be classified under two religions – the religion of works, where man either by himself or in cooperation with God (or so called gods) earns his salvation; and the religion of grace, where salvation is fully a work of God, where man trusts in Christ, who accomplished all that was necessary and acceptable for salvation. One is the religion of “do” and the other is the religion of “done” (Proverbs 14:12; Matthew 7:13-27). Salvation has always been, in every age, by faith alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone, and all for the glory of God alone.