

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JUSTIFICATION AND FAITH

Rev. H. Hofman sr. - Lord's Day 23, Question 61

Psalter 217

Scripture: Romans 10

Psalter 392

Psalter 422:4, 5, 6

Psalter 83

Dear congregation, we ask your attention for Lord's Day 23 of the Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 61:

Question 61: Why sayest thou, that thou art righteous by faith only?

Answer: Not that I am acceptable to God, on account of the worthiness of my faith; but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, is my righteousness before God; and that I cannot receive and apply the same to myself any other way than by faith only.

We wish to consider:

The Relationship Between Justification and Faith

1. This Relationship is Based on God's Word
2. This Relationship Excludes the Merits of Faith
3. This Relationship Includes the Necessity of Faith

I repeat: The Relationship Between Justification and Faith: First, This Relationship is Based on God's Word; secondly, This Relationship Excludes the Merits of Faith; and thirdly, This Relationship Includes the Necessity of Faith.

Question and Answer 60 closed with the statement, "inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart," and Answer 61 says, "that I cannot receive and apply the same (that is justification) to myself any other way than by faith only." Thus it must be clear out of these two statements from Answers 60 and 61 that there is a relationship between justification and faith. Faith is the instrumental cause whereby we must apply justification, and whereby we must

accept, receive, or embrace justification. That is necessary. We cannot do without it.

We have to remember, as we have heard in the previous Lord's Days, that God applies justification or the righteousness of Christ by imputation, and the believer applies it by faith. So often we talk so negatively. It is true that salvation is a work of God from beginning to end. It is a sovereign work of God. God changes, renews, and inclines the heart. There is nothing from our side, no fruit from our tree. That is impossible. But faith is implanted in the heart by regeneration. That renewed life, that faith, is an active faith. It is not passive. It is a new life. A dead sinner is passive--he can do nothing--but the renewed sinner believes. Faith is a plant and a work of God that always moves.

I believe that I have mentioned last time that there is no imputing without embracing. There is no imputing of the righteousness of Christ without receiving, without accepting this benefit. It is not so that if God imputes the righteousness of Christ in the heart of a sinner, and if He has made room for it in the heart of a sinner, that there is no answer of faith. That is impossible. The Lord does not do a half work. The Lord always does a complete work. If He has made a sinner righteous in Christ, and if He imputes it in the heart of a sinner, then it is also, as the Catechism says, "inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart."

What does it mean to accept, to embrace, or to receive this righteousness? That is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes room for Christ's righteousness and inclines the heart. He affects our thinking, and enlightens our understanding. He opens our eyes for what we are in ourselves, for our sinfulness, for the necessity of Christ, and for the beauty and glory of Christ. He gives a hunger and thirst after the righteousness of Christ. Thus to embrace the righteousness of Christ, to receive it, to accept it, is also called *applying* it to our own heart. It means that the soul acknowledges the necessity and completeness of the satisfaction of Jesus Christ. It means that such ones are concerned about their eternal destination, and that they hunger and thirst after the righteousness of Christ, which alone avails before God. It means that they are emptied by the Holy Spirit of their own righteousness, and that they are standing as a naked sinner before God, as it is explained in Answer 60: "that, though my conscience accuse me, that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil." That is a sinner who is emptied of himself, of his own righteousness, by the Holy Spirit.

What does it mean to embrace the imputed righteousness of Christ? It means that the soul takes refuge in the satisfaction of Christ, so that he might find shelter in it. The soul rejoices and glories in justification. It is the Holy Ghost who assures pardoned sinners of justification, and seals by His testimony that God has become their Father in Jesus Christ instead of being their Judge, and that they have become children of God. Romans 8:16 says, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."

Thus if we are talking about justification by faith, this is the consequence of justification in the sight of God. To impute the righteousness of Christ to the heart of a sinner, the answer is on our side, and that is here called justification by faith. This refers to the subjective application, the appropriation of the justifying grace of God. Passive justification takes place in the conscience of the sinner. It is a declaration of God. Then nothing is from our side, but it is the work of God. The sinner is passive in it. Justification that is not brought home would not answer the purpose of God, and the means whereby God carries the declaration of pardon into the heart is faith, true saving faith. In Question and Answer 65 we hope to hear who works faith in the heart: "Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all His benefits by faith only, whence doth this faith proceed? From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments." Thus in the future we hope to discuss and explain this further. Today we will only mention that it is absolutely necessary that we have true saving faith in our heart. It is by faith only that we appropriate the merits of Christ as the basis of our justification.

Faith is a work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a sinner. We have said that in this doctrine, based on God's Word, the subjective part of justification takes place in the heart of a sinner. It becomes our own by faith, as we have heard out of Romans 10:10, "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness," and in verse 17, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Verse 9 says, "If thou ... shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Thus this answer of the Catechism is biblical. In the epistle of Paul to the Romans, chapter 4, we read about the faith of Abraham. There it says in verse 3, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." Romans 4:16 says, "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace;" and in Galatians 2:16, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ,

that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." In Galatians 3:11 Paul says, "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith." In Galatians 5:4,5, we read, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." And thus we could continue.

Throughout the Bible we find that justification is by faith, and that the righteousness of Christ imputed by God to the sinner is embraced, accepted, received, and applied by faith only. This is a fact. It is a strong doctrine. We so often say, "by grace alone," "a one-sided work of God," "a sovereign work of God," "a free gift of God's grace," and that is the doctrine of Scripture. I would say, dear congregation, stay with this doctrine. We live in a world in which man must do something, and so often must do everything. We live in a time that it seems to be true that man can save himself, but if that were true, then not one person could be saved. If it was not God's work from beginning to end, then it would be hopeless for all of us. But because it is a one-sided, sovereign work of God, it is possible. As I have read for you, Paul quoted from Isaiah that the Lord says, "All day long I have stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people. I was found of them that sought Me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after Me." So good and so great is God, full of mercy and grace, and the pleasure of God shall prosper in the hand of Christ. It is God by the Holy Spirit who imputes the righteousness of Christ to the ungodly. He is so good that He also works faith in the heart in the moment of the renewing of their life. Then the stony heart is broken and taken away, and the divine plant of faith is implanted in the heart of a sinner. Then the dead sinner becomes alive.

That faith, as a work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a sinner, is an active faith. On this part many err. They think and talk about the passivity of the living sinner, of a child of God, but God's Word says that it is not possible. A faith without works is a dead faith, and a dead faith is no faith at all. It is different in a weak faith, but a dead faith is not faith. If you think that you can have faith without works, then you are deceiving yourself. It says here, "inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart," and Answer 61 says, "Not that I am acceptable to God, on account of the worthiness of my faith; but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, is my righteousness before

God; and that I cannot receive and apply the same to myself any other way than by faith only."

Thus, congregation, the instructor, on the basis of God's Word, gives us some light into the relationship between justification and faith. He says, "Not that I am acceptable to God, on account of the worthiness of my faith." The Arminians say that a sinner is justified by faith, as it is an act performed by man, and comes forth from man, but the Reformed forefathers condemned Arminius that faith is also a work and gift of God. Some have said that faith is to be considered as the account or condition of our justification. To call faith in this sense the condition of our justification would introduce human merits, and that is to the dishonor of God, to the dishonor of divine grace. It is often heard, "You must believe. Faith is the most important thing. If you have faith, then you have everything, and then you are alright." Congregation, that sounds biblical and it sounds good, but it is not true. Do we see the danger of the doctrine which says that if you have faith, then you have everything? Many are deceiving themselves in this way. You can hear it in other denominations and also among us. "You must believe, and if you have faith, don't worry about anything else. Faith is the most important thing." Well, we have to see that in the right light. God does not justify a sinner because of his faith. So often (and that is the danger) faith becomes our savior, faith becomes our righteousness, so that we trust in our faith. And that is *our* work. That is such a dangerous heresy and has destroyed many young people, also from among us. It is not on account of our faith. So many times you can hear that people are working for their faith; their faith is their savior, their faith is their righteousness. But the Catechism, based on God's Word, is very clear: "Not that I am acceptable to God, on account of the worthiness of my faith." Nothing but the merits of Christ can be our righteousness in the sight of God. I think we have heard it enough in past Sundays. It is not our faith, but the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ is our righteousness before God. If you think that you have faith and you are satisfied with faith, then you are not justified. I think of a beggar. Our forefathers called faith the hand of a beggar. Congregation, if a beggar has ten hands--you would say a very strong faith--but if there is nobody who lays something in the hands of that beggar, then he has nothing, even if he says, "I have ten hands" (which, of course, is not possible). If a person says, "I have a strong faith; I am a believer; I will go to heaven; I am a true believer; I have faith," it is only a hand, an instrument.

Somebody must lay something in the hands. There is something more necessary than faith. We need the righteousness of Christ imputed to our heart, and then we need faith to make it our own.

This is a hard lesson, but it is a necessary lesson, because we live in such a superficial time. There is so much ignorance about the doctrine of the Word of God, and many thousands of people are deceiving themselves with the Bible in their hands. Therefore, dear congregation, old and young, search the Scriptures. You need the righteousness of Christ. You need the work of Christ. God imputes the righteousness of Christ to our heart. Then we need faith to accept, to embrace, to receive, and to apply to our heart this righteousness which is imputed by God.

Thus this is an instruction out of the Catechism, based on the Word of God, that we are justified by true faith as an instrument, and never, never, on *account* of our faith. If we were justified on *account* of our faith, then Christ's righteousness would not be necessary. It would be the merit and cause of our righteousness. The instructor says, "only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, is my righteousness before God." Neither would it receive the satisfaction of another, for we would no longer stand in need of it. Nowhere does Scripture teach us that we are justified on account of our faith.

Justification by faith excludes all grounds for boasting and all ideas of merit, because faith is imperfect; faith is so often weak, even in the hearts of God's children, even in the greatest of believers. The disciples of Christ saw and felt the need to pray, "Lord, increase our faith." How can faith, weak faith, imperfect faith, be our righteousness before God? Faith is not everlasting. We may think that we are justified and righteous before God on account of our faith, but faith is not everlasting. If you do not have an everlasting righteousness, then you have nothing. Faith is only for the present life. It will be changed into vision. But the righteousness of Christ is an everlasting righteousness.

Faith in itself is a free gift, a work of God in the heart. It is grace, and therefore can merit nothing for us. Faith is man's act, and you must know how to understand that, congregation, but it is based on Scripture. We read so often in Scripture that it is called "his faith," "thy faith," "my faith." Jesus did not ask His disciples, "Where is My faith?" but He asked His disciples when they were in sore distress, "Where is *your* faith?" In Matthew 15:28 Jesus says, "O woman, great is *thy* faith!" Matthew 9:22 says, "Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath

made thee whole." Faith, as an instrument, as the hand of a beggar, is described as a looking, a receiving, a coming, a fleeing for refuge, a laying hold of, and a calling upon. Faith, receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is only the instrument of justification, so that it might become my own. It is the freedom to embrace and to apply the righteousness of Christ which is imputed in my heart, and that is only possible by faith. It is not meant that faith is the instrument wherewith God justifieth. No, faith is not an instrument on the part of God, not on the side of God. Faith is an instrument on our side. God does not need our faith to impute the righteousness of Christ to our heart. It is necessary, but it is an instrument on our part. For God the righteousness of Christ is enough, but the sinner needs faith to receive, to embrace, to apply the righteousness of Christ.

Thus, congregation, the function of faith is only that of a hand, of an instrument, receiving the righteousness of Christ. We are justified on our part by receiving, by embracing, and by applying that which God has imputed to the heart. And to receive something, to embrace something, we need a hand, we need an instrument. I have seen and learned something about that when I was in La Paz, Bolivia. There were many beggars on the roadside. Old women were sitting there the whole day, stretching forth their hands, asking, begging for alms. Once when we stopped the car to ask for directions, we saw the hand of a little, seven- or eight-year-old girl reaching into the car, begging to receive something. Congregation, where can you leave your gifts if there is not a hand to place them in? I also saw a man, who had no hands, standing against a wall. I could not give this man a gift. Faith is an instrument. Faith is the hand of the beggar. God has given and made this hand. He has given this instrument in the heart of a sinner. What is the relationship between justification and faith? "Not that I am acceptable to God, on account of the worthiness of my faith; but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, is my righteousness before God; and that I cannot receive and apply the same to myself any other way than by faith only." And when you give such a beggar a gift and you put it in their hands, what do you see? Then they draw back their hand to themselves. Then they own the gift. Then it is theirs.

Congregation, we need faith. It is necessary that this great gift of the righteousness of Christ, so to speak, is imputed to us, being laid in the hands of the beggar, and then by faith, lying in these hands, it becomes our own. He has imputed it to me, and I may embrace it as my own; I may apply it to my own

heart. Then I may see that I am covered, not with my hands, not with the instrument, but with the garments of the righteousness of Christ. That alone covers me from all my sins. That alone takes away the filthiness of my lost condition. That alone is enough. We need faith, but we cannot build on faith. Faith cannot take away our sins. Only the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sins. Our faith cannot cover anything of our corrupt nature, but the righteousness of Christ is a garment which fits for the greatest of sinners.

Let us first sing from Psalter 422, stanzas 4, 5, and 6.

What a deep doctrine! How necessary it is to stay with it, because it is the Word of God. We are instructed in this doctrine, also at the time of the Reformation, that this Word of God, the righteousness of Christ, is the only way. His work is a complete work. Oh, that we may stay with this doctrine of the one-sided and sovereign work of God. There is not any merit in our faith. It is one hundred percent the work of Christ, the righteousness of Christ imputed to a sinner from all eternity, in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, but also in the heart of a sinner. It is without our works, but faith is an instrument, as a hand, to receive these benefits. I will read for you Article 22 of the Confession of Faith: "We believe that, to attain the true knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ, with all His merits, appropriates Him, and seeks nothing more besides Him. For it must needs follow, either that all things, which are requisite to our salvation, are not in Jesus Christ, or if all things are in Him, that then those who possess Jesus Christ through faith, have complete salvation in Him. Therefore, for any to assert, that Christ is not sufficient, but that something more is required besides Him, would be too gross a blasphemy: for hence it would follow, that Christ was but half a Savior. Therefore we justly say with Paul, that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith without works. However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean, that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our Righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all His merits, and so many holy works which He has done for us, and in our stead, is our Righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits, which, when become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins." Thus, congregation, based on God's Word and the confession of our Reformed fathers, we may know, and keep it in your heart and mind, that the only ground of

salvation is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and the only instrument is faith, true saving faith, an active faith worked by the Holy Spirit in the heart of a sinner.

And then what happens after justification? Are they then done with everything? Are God's people always happy? Can they live in sin, stay away from God's institutions, and live without the law? No, they have not yet arrived; they need more. I think about the instruction of God's Word in Zephaniah 3:12, "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord." Even after justification, after receiving the imputed righteousness of Christ, they remain a poor, hopeless, helpless, afflicted people in themselves. Does that not contradict the doctrine of justification? No. Their sins are forgiven. The sinner is cut off from Adam and incorporated into Christ. But in the life of sanctification they remain sinners. The more light we receive in our heart, the more we understand Paul when he says, "Therefore being justified by faith ... we have access by faith into this grace." Knowing himself, he said, "O wretched man that I am!"; "I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I." Is that not a poor creature, but also one who trusts in the name of the Lord, as a person carnal and sold under sin, as a wretched creature, hoping and pleading on the imputed righteousness of Christ? The life of sanctification is a life in which we receive more light in our heart. Oh, then Paul said, "If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing." What a light in the heart! Have you ever learned something of it, that "I know that in my flesh dwelleth no good thing"? Is that not a great and bright light in the heart of Paul? Is it not true, as I have mentioned, that the Lord says, "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people"? We also need faith, the light of the Holy Spirit, in order to look into our own hearts, faith in God's Word. For that is what God's Word says, that no good dwelleth in me, "for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not." Is that not a poor creature? "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do"; "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" You can never become a great Christian, even after justification. Do you know what remains? A poor creature. "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." That keeps a justified person low in dust and ashes. There you can know them and find

them, "Oh God, what a wretch I am! What a poor creature, carnal, sold under sin." They also feel constantly the necessity for confession of their sins and prayer for pardon, but the pleading ground in their prayer is ever-present. They have no pleading ground in their good works. They have no pleading ground in their faith. No, they know that they are a wretch. "O wretched man that I am!" Do you know what their pleading ground is? The perfect righteousness of Christ. They see Him, not only in His suffering and death, but also in His exaltation, interceding before the Father, always standing there with His blood. Oh, that is the pleading ground on which they pray. If they are knocking at the throne of grace, they will never come to despair, but as a wretch, an unclean sinner, they have the promise that God will never deal with them according to their sins and transgressions. They are not under the law, but under grace. That is their hope. Even after being justified, there is no hope in themselves. They are people with empty hands, always nothing in themselves, but everything in Him. There is no merit in their faith, but it is Christ alone. The meriting cause is only the satisfaction and righteousness of Christ. That is the beginning and the end.

Congregation, I would say again, stay with this doctrine. Pray the Lord for light in your heart, also for our young generation. My dear young friends, don't listen to the lies of this world, also the religious lies. Here is the true doctrine of the righteousness of Christ imputed to the heart of a sinner, and embraced by faith as an instrument, as the hand of a beggar, so that we may receive such a benefit with a believing heart. Amen.

Psalter 83:All Stanzas