

CATHOLIC UNDERSTANDING OF JUSTIFICATION - THE STATE OF BEING CONSIDERED JUST BY GOD

CATHOLIC INTERPRETATION OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Christians say it is not enough to be just free from sin but you need your sin made up for. If you are just clean from sin that is not enough. You need to earn a relationship with God. Jesus did that for us by making up for our sins for us by dying on the cross.

Paul said we are justified by faith without the works of the Law. Protestants say he meant we are saved by faith without good works. Catholics say we are saved by both but they say they agree that works of the Law of God have nothing to do with justification. Some argue that the Bible saying you are justified by works does not mean you are saved by works. But as salvation and justification though separate need to happen together that point does not matter much. Practically speaking one is the other.

Back to what Paul wrote about salvation having nothing to do with the works of the Law of Moses but having everything to do with faith.

Catholics say he means salvation is without the Law only for the one who repents and believes but after that their salvation depends on their keeping the Law. In short, they think that once you are saved you have to obey to stay saved. The Galatians had accepted salvation from Christ by faith alone but they started to obey the Law of Moses to gain salvation which was why Paul severely told them off and called them fools (page 6, Legalism – A Smokescreen). He did say they were cutting themselves off from the miraculous gift of power to do good works and serve God but he never said they would lose salvation for this though their new gospel would bring damnation to any new convert by preventing that convert from accepting salvation the only thing it would do for them would be to make them fools and saved enemies of Christ. He would have said if it would cost them salvation for that would be the central thing but he didn't. He is clearly rejecting the view that we are meant to be saved by faith alone and kept in salvation by obedience or that you are saved without good works at the start but afterwards you have to obey for disobedience will cost you your salvation.

In Romans 4 Paul says that we are saved by faith without obedience like Abraham which makes Abraham the father of the follower of the path of faith, the path that faith requires you to walk after you believe so Paul believes that faith alone saves not just at the start of belief but while you try to live out that belief. Paul said that his being the hardest worker among the apostles was not down to himself but to the grace of God (1 Corinthians 15:10) implying that good works are not meritorious for salvation because they are all God's doing and he just programs us to do them and he rewards them though it is rewarding his own work. He said that Paul no longer lives but Jesus lives in him and through him. Its not Paul and Jesus but just Jesus.

The Protestants are right because Paul said that the reason the Law can't save is because we can't obey it. Paul said that all those who relied on obeying God's Law, the Law of Moses, were completely cut off from God's friendship (in mortal sin to use the Catholic terminology) for they did not seek God (Romans 3:11, 20) and were unjustified. The Law offered the grace of forgiveness for a fresh start and it still could not save. So, if the Jews could not be saved by being forgiven and by obeying neither could the Catholics for they have the same system of salvation by repentance and faith with a view to obedience. To be saved you have to agree that once you are saved you are saved forever and nothing can make you unsaved.

I used to argue that Paul considered even perfect obedience to be no good. I felt that when Paul said that those who observed the Law would not be saved he meant those who kept it perfectly for you couldn't say that a sinner going through the motions was observing the Law. I realise now that you could if you teach that all are sinners like Paul did and so that all who observe the Law are doing so only outwardly. Paul's statement that he was beyond reproach when it came to justice as taught by the Law (Philippians 3:6) does not prove that he believed that the Law could be kept perfectly and still not save because he says elsewhere that he was a sinner at this time so he means that he was beyond reproach in the eyes of other people not that he was perfect.

Catholics believe in mortal sin, sin that divorces you from God completely, and venial sin, sin that does not do this. Since Paul says that failure to keep the Law right prevents salvation and justification it is clear that all sin must have been considered mortal by all who tried to keep the Law. If you sin falsely believing all sin to be mortal you are guilty of mortal sin for that is what you meant to commit. Catholics maintain that keeping the Law saves but the Jews were not saved by it for they thought all sin was grave sin or mortal.

We reject this interpretation for these reasons:

1) What a Law does not condemn it allows. The Law did not condemn belief in venial sin explicitly but threatened death to all who would not obey God (Deuteronomy 28; Leviticus 18:5) meaning that their sins were so detested by God that he wanted them dead. When a book says such things as if there is no such thing as venial sin then it says there is none.

2) Paul taught that the Law itself and not peoples' misinterpretation of it and its doctrine about sin kept them away from God and it caused this separation by being something they could not keep. He wrote that it is good for nothing but exposing sin (Romans 3:20) which it wouldn't be if the Catholic understanding of salvation and sin were correct.

A God who punishes sincerity is a supreme bigot whereas the Bible God is just.

3) The Law would not be just and good like Paul says (Romans 6:12) if it omitted to teach that there was a distinction between mortal and venial sin if there was one for that would be forcing millions to commit mortal sin. Paul said that sin is not God's fault for God is holy (holy means will have nothing to do with evil). Mortal sin would be on his account, if he misled the children of Israel into it.

4) The Jews did not believe in sin that only partially took one away from God yet Paul said that the Gentiles who did believe were as badly off as regards fellowship with God as they were (Romans 3:9,10). All are said to have been in a state of mortal sin. So was the Gentile belief in venial sin - a belief as ancient as the continents - faked for if they really believed in it they would not all have been estranged from God by sin? Or is Paul saying that venial sin cuts one off from God even if one believes it doesn't? No for that wouldn't be fair.

(Bible-bashers must agree that Paul is declaring that the whole world supernaturally knows that there is no venial sin. Their belief implies that the Catholic Church is opposed to God for she says it does exist. It implies the Catholics are all anti-Christ. And that Catholics honour the pope before God for they won't love the truth. They worship the pope as God in the sense that they are treating him as something better.)

Some antichrists want us to think that when Paul said that obedience to the Law could not make a person right with God he only meant that the Laws about ceremonies couldn't save and cited circumcision as an example. The Catholic Church says that he did not mean that good works are unnecessary for salvation but that only the works specific to the Law of Moses like circumcision and sacrifices were unnecessary. But he made it clear that the Law cannot save those who obey it because it tells them what sin is and they sin (Romans 3:20). Plus it would be easier to obey the ceremonies and rites of the Law than to live a holy life so the ceremonies and rites are not the reason the law cannot save!

The widely distributed Tan booklet by Paul Whitcomb for luring the unwary into Roman Catholicism, *The Catholic Church has the Answer*, advances this antichrists' view. But Paul, the apostle, makes no such distinction. If he meant the ceremonial precepts he wouldn't have called them the Law for that would be confusing and they are not the Law but only half of it.

The Law commands people to keep the ceremony Laws and forbids breaking them as sinful. The antichrists are saying that God rejected those who observed the ceremonial Laws because they thought they were doing right! They purposely ignore the fact that it is easier to live by religious rules of worship and cleanness as the ceremonial Laws have them than it is to be a kindly person in daily life. This was why the gospels condemned the Jewish leaders for having so many religious taboos with no real moral living in daily life. The leaders preferred the religious rules. But the Law of Moses when followed properly without all these rules is not asking a lot with its ceremonial regulations about washing and unclean food and circumcision and all the rest. The Jews regarded the ceremonies and indeed the whole Law of Moses as a joy and not as a burden and not difficult (Deuteronomy 30:10-14). The Catholic Church's distortion fools no one except those who want to be fooled.

Some Catholics say that the Law failed to save the Jews because they did not have faith in the grace of God that is the power of God to enable and help you to obey. Catholics say that to do good that merits salvation one must trust in and accept the power of God to help you to do this good. If one does not, then the good is purely human good and cannot please God. They would use Galatians 3:23 which says that before faith came we were kept under the Law in preparation for the faith that would be revealed, as backup. But the verse only means, not that the Law was opposed to faith for you had to have faith in the Law and in God to even think about trying to obey the Law, but that the Law was a preparation for faith as Christians have it. It was a preparation for the Christian faith with its aspirations and dogmas. Only slightly crazy people like Paul would believe that for there is no evidence that the Law was interested even remotely in a person like Jesus Christ.

But the Law did advocate faith in grace and the prophets even more so. Even more shockingly the Law when properly interpreted and not cluttered by human tradition is not hard to keep (Deuteronomy 30:11) so the idea that the Law was against grace is wrong because people had no excuse for breaking it and weakness was not an excuse. This means that God forgave people and was their friend and supporter according to the promises of the Law purely by grace - undeserved favour. The Catholic view that Paul only said the Jews could not be saved by obeying the Law because they were trying to earn salvation on their own is therefore wrong. This means that Paul believed that obedience was totally unnecessary for

salvation.

Even Jesus Christ in Luke 16 said that the Pharisee Jew who was rejected by God though he sincerely believed himself to be good and thanked God for making him good believed in grace. The Pharisee did not exercise belief as a gift from God and that was why his sincerity was no use. Jesus saw that the Law was not opposed to God helping you to be good and that it even demanded that belief. The people had to pray to be able to do his will better so they were asking for his divine influence. That is what grace is, God inspiring your thoughts or feelings or both to make you attracted to his ways and to maintain adherence to his teaching. God rejected the Pharisee for believing that faith was not enough and good works were needed too, to be right with God.

Paul wrote that the Law is not based on faith. He meant faith in salvation despite sin or in the salvation of people who refuse to abandon sin totally. Obviously, the Law commanded all the other kinds of faith including the kind of divinely inspired faith that does not go as far as holding that faith alone saves without works. It did this when it commanded even those who would never see the miracles that Moses did should believe in the Law as the word of God meaning that only God could enable you to see that it was his word by speaking to your heart. You can't obey the Law of God insincerely so you have to believe in it first. To refrain from murder though you don't believe in the Law banning murder is not obeying the Law but making it look like you do for you are saying and thinking to yourself that it is not a Law for you. If you refrain it is not out of hearty obedience but for some other reason, you are not refraining because of the Law.

The Law promised forgiveness so God must have given grace for he says that he will only forgive sinners who use his help. Yet Paul in Galatians 5:2 tells his disciples that if they get circumcised that Jesus and the salvation he won for them is no good to them. But all those would have believed that if they got circumcised they were promising to obey the law but with the help and grace of Jesus and that if they failed he had obeyed it for them so they would still be classed by God as obedient. He would have credited Jesus' obedience to their account. They did not deny that Jesus suffered for their sins and they were not agreeing to try and earn salvation by keeping the law when they underwent circumcision. Paul is clearly indicating that to become a Christian and stay one you must not have any religious rules. There must be no regulations about baptism and good works. What you do is offer nothing to God but just accept the salvation offered by Jesus Christ. You offer good works to God but these have nothing to do with gaining salvation. How could Paul accuse people who got circumcised of trying to be justified by the law and severing themselves from Jesus and grace? (Gal 5:4). Because the Holy Spirit is meant to inspire holy deeds not the law. You do good not to satisfy the law but because the Holy Spirit makes you delight in good. That is the whole point of what he wrote about Christ making us free and not slaves (Gal 5:1). He is not condemning religious activity like circumcision or good works but making an obligation of them. Thus the rites and sacraments of the Roman Church which are obligatory are condemned.

Catholics argue that when Paul said that God would justify the circumcised by faith without the law in Romans 3:28-30 he meant that circumcision couldn't save for it was not a work of grace (page 116, Born Fundamentalist, Born Again Catholic). They argue that nothing in his theology excludes the Catholic understanding of salvation by faith and good works. So we are led to think that when Paul was using circumcision as an example that he did not mean that works, with grace and without it, couldn't save. We are led to believe that he only meant that graceless works, works that were tried without seeking the help of God, cannot contribute to salvation. But Paul never said that circumcision was a graceless work so the verse does nothing to prove what they say. It could be a grace work, if he thought of it as a work at all. The Catholic Church teaches that you get grace to do what your conscience says is good even if you are mistaken so the idea that circumcision is a graceless work is ridiculous.

There were many in the early Church that believed just what the Catholic Church believes about good works. The earliest Church was made up of Jews. They saw no reason why they could not still live out the Jewish Law after having become Christians and sought grace to help them do it. Nowhere in Romans does Paul hint that he means that good works done by grace save which he would have had to make plain for people would take his doctrine of salvation without works to exclude those works too.

I am tired of Rome trying to tell us that Paul meant attempts to earn salvation without grace by works and selected circumcision as an example for the simple reason that circumcision is not your work, it's done to you as a child. By the circumcised Paul meant those who had been done as babies. When a work that was not even done by you cannot save you how could one that you do by grace? What did Paul need an example for? All he had to do was talk about works that were intended to earn salvation. This is a skilled religious teacher we are talking about. And if he wanted an example he could have found a better one such as giving alms or something.

The Law of Moses did advocate salvation by grace and works so the idea that circumcision was an example of a work without grace is mad. The Psalms are full of praise to God from people who felt they had got their holiness and righteousness from him. Psalm 84:5 says that the man who has his strength in God is blessed.

Circumcision was thought by the Jews to be a gift from God that entitled one to be part of the covenant and undeserved

blessings from God. The use of this example shows that Paul was taking care to exclude ideas such as those of the Catholic Church that doing works by and with the grace of God are necessary for salvation and make you deserve Heaven. It also shows that the Catholic idea of getting grace by going to the sacraments is likewise false.

None of the Catholic excuses for rejecting the Protestant interpretation of Paul's doctrine that salvation is by faith without the works of the Law work so Protestantism is correct in its interpretation.