

The Relationship Between Faith and Works

A Comparison of James 2:24 and Ephesians 2:8-10

Part IV

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To My Father
In Loving Memory

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May 11, 1923—August 9, 2005

Who Dedicated His Life To Loving His Family
“Family Comes First”

I Miss You!

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*Faith of our fathers! Living still In spite of dungeon, fire, and sword,
O how our hearts beat high with joy Whene'er we hear that glorious
word: faith of our fathers, holy faith! We will be true to thee till
death.*

-Fredrick W. Faber-

Introduction

The relationship between faith and works or justification and sanctification, is the point where Roman Catholic and Protestant Theology fundamentally differ. The church, according to Luther, taught that individuals gained favor and acceptance from God on the basis of status and achievements, rather than the grace of God. Luther might have been mistaken due to the level of confusion within the church. The doctrine of justification is where the confusion was at its greatest.¹ No one could tell him the church's position on the matter of justification. The most recent declaration recognized by the church that related to the doctrine of justification was dated 418, which did little to clarify the church's position more than a thousand years later in 1518.² According to Roman teaching, the works of man have merit and therefore contribute to justification. McGrath, describing Luther's early teaching³ writes, "...the sinner is able to do

¹ Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1988), 105.

² *Ibid.*, 32.

³ In his early teaching, Luther was a faithful follower of the views of the *via moderna* or 'Nominalism.' This movement's view of justification was Pelagian. God accepted people on the condition that he fulfills certain demands. For further study read Alister McGrath, *Reformation Thought An Introduction* (Maldin, Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), pages 74-76.

something which ensures that God responds by justifying him or her...Nevertheless, a definite human effort is required to place God under an obligation to reward the sinner with grace.”⁴

Through much study, Luther was convinced that the church did not understand the Gospel. The issue of justification was a matter of life and death for the church. Luther called it “the article by which the church stands or falls.” The church did not grasp the role of grace in salvation. The theologian who defended the concept of grace the most forcefully was Augustine of Hippo, which is why he became known as ‘the doctor of grace.’⁵ He emphasized that salvation was by grace alone because he understood this doctrine in light of the backdrop of human depravity. Getting a grasp on salvation by grace puts works in their proper place. It was during the Reformation that the writings of Augustine as well as the New Testament writings of Paul were of renewed interest. Historically, it was from the confusion revolving around the doctrine of justification that Protestantism was born.⁶

The Reformed understanding of the proper relationship between justification and sanctification and particularly the roles of faith and works will be discussed from the writings of Saint Augustine, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards. Augustine will represent the thought as developed in the early 5th century. John Calvin will represent the mature Reformation view in the 16th century and Jonathan Edwards will represent the Puritan view of the 18th century.

Saint Augustine

Augustine saw an organic unity of the whole human race and corporate solidarity with Adam. Adam’s rebellion affected the entire human race. Augustine writes in his “Confessions,” that he was struck with illness that all but carried him off to hell loaded with all the evil he committed against God, himself, and others and a host of other offenses over and above the bond of original sin, “by which we all have died with Adam.”⁷ Augustine described humanity as a “mass of perdition.” After the fall, man lost his ability to not sin, which he referred to as, *non posse non peccare*. Resulting from Adam’s fall, all humanity is born under the sentence of death with all its consequences. In *The Enchiridion* Augustine writes:

Thence, after his [Adam] sin, he was driven into exile, and by his sin the whole race of which he was the root was corrupted in him, and thereby subjected to the penalty of death. And so it happens that all descended from him, and from the woman who had led him into sin, and was condemned at the same time with him, --being the offspring of carnal lust

⁴ McGrath, 106.

⁵ Ibid., 103.

⁶ Timothy George, 62.

⁷ Augustine, *Confessions* (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), 101-2.

on which the same punishment of disobedience was visited, --were tainted with the original sin, and were by it drawn through divers errors and sufferings into that last and endless punishment which they suffer in common with the fallen angels, their corrupters and masters, and the partakers of their doom. And thus 'by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.' By 'the world' the apostle, of course, means in this place the whole human race.⁸

Adam's fallen condition is passed on to all his progeny. Man has a sinful nature, the predisposition to sin. Man has lost his freedom to obey God in his natural condition; he is inclined toward evil and is under the wrath of God. Augustine writes:

Thus, then, matters stood. The whole mass of the human race was under condemnation, was lying steeped and wallowing in misery, and was being tossed from one form of evil to another, and, having joined the faction of the fallen angels, was paying the well-merited penalty of that impious rebellion. For whatever the wicked freely do through blind and unbridled lust, and whatever they suffer against their will in the way of open punishment, this all evidently pertains to the just wrath of God.⁹

All actual sin is based on or grounded in man's fallen nature. In three ways man is guilty of Adam's sin—fallen short of God's holy standard. First, man is guilty because his representative has rebelled against God. Secondly, man is guilty because all of humanity is organically connected to Adam, meaning that we played a role in the fall and were in some sense present at the fall in Adam through whom we participated. And thirdly, man is guilty because man continues to commit sin, which demonstrates the sinful nature that has been passed down to us from Adam.¹⁰

Only God's grace can reverse the effect of Adam's rebellion. In Augustine's view, salvation is never rooted in the works of man nor is salvation by the will of man; rather, it is by the grace of God through faith.¹¹

Prior to Augustine, little attention was devoted to the nature of faith, although it was always acknowledged as the necessary means of salvation. Augustine, contemplating over the issues of faith, claimed that man could not produce faith, for it does not originate in man, but is rather a gift of God.¹² He writes:

⁸ Augustine, *The Enchiridion: On Faith, Hope, and Love*, trans. by J. F. Shaw, in Augustine, *Basic Writing of Saint Augustine*, ed. Whitney J. Oates, 2 Vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1948), chap. 26.

⁹ Ibid., chap. 27.

¹⁰ Frank James, "Lesson 12: History of Christianity I" (Lecture, Reformed Theological Seminary, Virtual, Charlotte, 2003).

¹¹ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, chap 30.

¹² Ibid. chap 31.

And lest men should arrogate to themselves the merit of their own faith at least, not understanding that this too is the gift of God, this same apostle, who says in another place that he had “obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful,” here also adds: “and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”¹³

Augustine used the term in different ways. He spoke of faith at times as an intellectual assent of truth. But justifying faith was more; it consisted of love and self-surrender. Saving faith was perfected in love and was the motivation or ground of good works. Augustine did not have a proper understanding of the relationship between faith and justification. This could have been due to the fact that he did not have a proper connection between justification and sanctification.¹⁴ It is evident from his writings that works performed by man had no role to fill in justification, but rather he contributed it to the grace of God that he regarded as sovereign and efficacious.¹⁵

Fallen man cannot perform good works unless the grace of God has freed him from the bondage of sin. Adam destroyed his will by the deliberate choice to rebel against God in the garden. Due to the organic unity of the human race, this act of disobedience destroyed the will of all men. The freedom of the will was removed and man cannot give himself the freedom it once enjoyed. Augustine writes:

For what good work can a lost man perform, except so far as he has been delivered from perdition? Can they do anything by the free determination of their own will? Again I say, God forbid. For it was by the evil use of his free-will that man destroyed both it and himself. For, as a man who kills himself must, of course, be alive when he kills himself, but after he has killed himself ceases to live, and cannot restore himself to life; so, when man by his own free-will sinned, then sin being victorious over him, the freedom of his will was lost. “For of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.” This is the judgment of the Apostle Peter. And as it is certainly true, what kind of liberty, I ask, can the bond-slave possess, except when it pleases him to sin? For he is freely in bondage who does with pleasure the will of his master. Accordingly, he who is the servant of sin is free to sin. And hence he will not be free to do right, until, being freed from sin, he shall begin to be the servant of righteousness.¹⁶

The grace of God is necessary for man’s will to possess true liberty. The will, in bondage to sin, sins freely and cannot do right until by grace it is set free from sin. The will, when free from sin’s reign, is a servant of righteousness. The gift of grace results in the necessary performing of good works. God’s grace transforms the fallen will and

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Louis Berkhof, 496.

¹⁵ Ibid., 512.

¹⁶ Augustine, *The Enchiridion*, chap 30.

frees it from bondage and makes man into a new creation. Where man naturally desired to sin, he now desires to do good. Good works are evidence of justifying faith. This does not mean that redeemed man is not still affected by sin. Man, although no longer ruled by sin, is not perfectly free from all its influence. Augustine writes:

And test it should be thought that good works will be wanting in those who believe, he adds further: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." We shall be made truly free, then, when God fashions us, that is, forms and creates us anew, not as men--for He has done that already--but as good men, which His grace is now doing, that we may be a new creation in Christ Jesus, according as it is said: "Create in me a clean heart, O God." For God had already created his heart, so far as the physical structure of the human heart is concerned; but the psalmist prays for the renewal of the life which was still lingering in his heart.¹⁷

Augustine was the first to develop definite ideas about sanctification, which influenced the church in the Middle Ages. He did not distinguish between justification and sanctification, but held the view that sanctification was included in justification. He believed in the total corruption of human nature, and sanctification was a new supernatural impartation of the divine life. An important element in sanctification is the personal love for Christ, but he viewed grace as metaphysical—God deposits it in man. He did not stress the primary role of faith as the transforming factor in the believer's life. Justification included the infusion of divine grace in the soul. Grace comes from the inexhaustible treasury of the merits of Christ and its imputation to the believers by the sacraments.

From God's perspective, grace removes original sin and imparts intrinsic righteousness and gives the ability to do good works. From man's perspective, "supernatural works of faith working through love have merit before God and secure an increase of grace." These good works are not possible apart from the grace of God. This process was known as justification rather than sanctification. This process consisted in making man just before the judgment of God.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid., chap 31.

¹⁸ Louis Berkhof, 529-30.

John Calvin

The doctrine of justification by faith is the most central aspect of Calvin's theological system.¹⁹ In his *Institutes*, Calvin refers to justification as "the main hinge on which religion turns." He writes, "For unless you first of all grasp what your relationship to God is, and the nature of his judgment concerning you, you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation nor one on which to build piety towards God."²⁰

All men are prone to God's holy wrath resulting from original sin.²¹ Original sin corrupted all aspects of man. Everything man does is tainted with this affect. Calvin defines original sin as, "...a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul which first makes us liable to God's wrath, then also brings forth in us those works which Scripture calls 'works of flesh' (Gal. 5:19)."²² Resulting from original sin is a life characterized by the flesh. The mind is set on the desires of the flesh, which in turn affect the motives and actions of man. Everything man does violates God's holy law. Man is enslaved to the flesh and is helpless to move toward God. Calvin writes:

Because of the bondage of sin by which the will is held bound, it cannot move toward good, much less apply itself therto; for a movement of this sort is the beginning of conversion to God, which in Scripture is ascribed entirely to God's grace.²³

Man being dead in sins, is spiritually dead. "As spiritual death is nothing else than the alienation of the soul from God, we are all born as dead men, and we live as dead men, until we are made partakers of the life of Christ..."²⁴

Salvation from spiritual death and all it encompasses is received only by faith. God the Father, out of love, gave Christ to be grasped and possessed in faith. Receiving Christ reconciles man to God through Christ's righteousness and sanctifies him for the purpose of cultivating a blameless and pure life.

God is the cause of justification and there is no role for man to fulfill to make him worthy of justification. Man receives God's acceptance and is justified only by His "divine goodness."²⁵ Reid commenting on God's motive writes, "Yet as one studies both the

¹⁹ W. Stanford Reid, "Justification By Faith According To John Calvin," *Westminster Theological Journal* 42 (1980): 291.

²⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, J. T. McNeill, ed., F. L. Battles, trans., (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.11.1.

²¹ Original sin is the first sin of Adam imputed to all men in which corrupted the whole man.

²² *Insts.* 2.1.8.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2.3.5.

²⁴ Eph 2:1 (Where Scripture references are given, the reference is to Calvin's Commentaries).

²⁵ W. Stanford Reid, 291.

Institutes and his commentaries, one finds that the love of God is a major theme which he continually elaborates. He always comes back to it as the *fons et origo* of man's salvation."²⁶ God is never motivated by any work of man nor could man obligate Him in any way.

Faith is not something man manufactured. Calvin taught that true faith originates with God who gives it to the elect.²⁷ Faith is a gift of God's mercy in regeneration, which resulted from our union with Christ. Regeneration enables man to have true knowledge of God's wrath and mercy, which results in true faith. Therefore, we can clearly understand why Calvin rejected the role of works in justification²⁸ and defended the doctrine of faith alone against the notion of works or a syncretism of faith and works as the Roman doctrines teach.²⁹ The gift of faith, independent of all human efforts, justifies the sinner before God by the imputation of Christ's righteousness.³⁰

While works play no role in justification, they are the result of true faith. Good works have no merit in themselves because they are not righteous. All works, ceremonial or moral, are corrupted by sin³¹ and our hearts are never pure and therefore are not good enough to meet the law's demands. Calvin defines faith as:

...a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.³²

Faith, based on the promise of God and rooted in the knowledge of Christ, is never alone. Calvin rejects the notion that faith is *only* a concession of the promise of God,³³ but understood it to be connected with good works. Calvin writes,

For we dream neither of a faith devoid of good works nor of a justification that stands without them. This alone is of importance: having admitted that faith and good works must cleave together, we still lodge justification in faith, not in works.³⁴

Calvin saw no separation between justification and sanctification. He further writes, "Yet you could not grasp this [justification] without at the same time grasping sanctification

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 296.

²⁸ *Insts.* 3.11.13.

²⁹ Ibid., 3.11.14.

³⁰ Ibid., 3.11.18.

³¹ Ibid., 3.11.17.

³² Ibid., 3.2.7.

³³ Jas 2:14.

³⁴ *Insts.* 3.16.1.

also.”³⁵ Whomever Christ justifies, He sanctifies; justification and sanctification are joined with an “everlasting and indissoluble bond.”³⁶

There is a real connection between faith and works in the same way there is a real connection between justification and sanctification. These can be distinguished, but never separated. Faith without good works is a “moral and spiritual impossibility.”³⁷ Calvin placed justification in faith, because it is the work of Christ that justifies us, not our work.³⁸ While Calvin stressed justification by faith, he does not ignore regeneration. God works by his Spirit in the renewal of life. Reid writes:

...the foundation of the Christian’s new life is a ‘true and living faith’ which is nourished and strengthened day by day through the working of the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies the Christian by enabling him to perform good works to the glory of God, subduing the lusts of the flesh, obeying the law and showing love to the brethren.³⁹

Calvin rejected the idea of faith being a good work. He referred to the concept as “foolery” and rejects the idea that faith itself has any merit.⁴⁰ Man, apart from God’s grace, cannot attribute to himself a single good work, not even faith. All good works are the result of God’s grace.⁴¹ Good works not only conform to the law of God, but they result from a motive of love for God. Unbelievers are not capable of works that are pleasing to God. The unregenerate are never motivated by love for God. Although, the works of the regenerate are acceptable, even though they are imperfect, because God works through man by His Spirit to produce these good works. Calvin writes, “...nothing else but that God’s children are pleasing and lovable to him, since he sees in them the marks and features of his own countenance.” He continues:

But because the godly, encompassed with mortal flesh, are still sinners, and their good works are as yet incomplete and redolent of the vices of the flesh, he can be propitious neither to the former nor to the latter unless he embrace them in Christ rather than in themselves.⁴²

Only in union with Christ are works regarded as good because they result from the work of the Holy Spirit, which God accepts by grace. Good works are never truly good in and of themselves.

Faith is not self-generated, but is a gift from God and it is certain knowledge of God’s goodness rooted in the promise in Christ and revealed to our minds and sealed in our

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ R. C. Sproul, 160.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ W. Stanford Reid, 303.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 304.

⁴¹ *Insts.* 2.3.12.

⁴² Ibid., 3.17.5.

hearts by the Holy Spirit. While man is saved by faith, his faith is never void of works. Calvin taught that man is incapable of performing good works apart from the grace of God. Prior to regeneration or after, all works are tainted with sin. But God, by his grace, accepts the works of the regenerated as good in Christ. Calvin saw a necessary connection between faith and good works in the same way that justification cannot be separated from sanctification. Man is justified by faith alone and no work of man is meritorious, but true saving faith always accompanies works.

Jonathan Edwards

Edwards held that all men are born with original sin, which he defines as the “innate sinful depravity of the heart.” Original sin has two aspects according to Edwards. The first is that human nature is depraved. In the disposition of the heart lies all uprightness or wickedness of all moral qualities. Edwards points out that the heart has a “true tendency” that proceeds from its disposition. Edwards concludes that fallen man has a natural inclination to sin; this ‘tendency’ is natural to the “natural man.” For Edwards says:

...if there be any thing in the nature of man whereby he has an universal unfailling tendency to that moral evil which, according to the real nature and true demerit of things as there are in themselves, implies his utter ruin, that must be looked upon as an evil tendency or propensity.⁴³

The heart has a moral depravity and therefore man has a tendency to sin. “Then may it be said, man’s nature or state is attended with a pernicious or destructive tendency in a moral sense.”⁴⁴

The second is that original sin is the imputation of Adam’s rebellion to all his progeny. Edwards uses many passages of Scripture to support this doctrine.⁴⁵ Edwards concludes that this sinful tendency resulted from the imputation of Adam’s sin to the entire human race.

Because of original sin and its effects, Edwards emphasized justification by faith alone. Justification is by the works of Christ alone and not the works of man. Man cannot merit justification, but in union with Christ, the works⁴⁶ of Christ are imputed to the believer through faith. Edwards linked the believers’ union with Christ to the imputation of

⁴³ Ola Elizabeth Winslow ed., *Jonathan Edwards Basic Writings*. (New York: New American Library, 1966.), 227.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁴⁵ Rom 3:10-18, which states that no one is righteous, no one understands, no one seeks God, and that all have turned away, and no one does good, and etc.

⁴⁶ or righteousness.

Christ's righteousness, just as Adam's sin and fallen nature was imputed to all men.⁴⁷ Therefore, through faith man is justified on the ground of Christ's perfection alone.

Faith is based on knowledge because it is rational. Faith is a reliance of the soul on the sufficiency of God. Knowledge of Christ must be present before the soul can be united to Christ. Faith is "that by which the soul is united to Christ."⁴⁸ Faith is not only intellectual or rational. Faith "is an ascent of the soul to what it understands."⁴⁹ Edwards distinguishes between the unbelievers and the believers in that the believers "gladly acquiesce in their knowledge of Christ." Unbelievers may have true knowledge but never truly submit to or embrace that knowledge. Faith is not a profession only. Justifying faith not only involves the intellect, but it is an inclination and an act of the will toward God.⁵⁰ True faith has the distinctive character of love and is the whole soul receiving Christ. Only the faith that works by love has value to God.

Only a work of God can change man's motive away from sin and toward good. When the Holy Spirit resides in a person, repentance—a change of mind—takes place. Conversion was a turning to God from sin, which he attributed to God alone; man could not will himself to such an act.⁵¹ A change of mind is a willing to do good because "those controlled by the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires" (Romans 8:8).

Faith alone justifies, but true faith, according to Edwards, is "seen by God as a continuing fruitful faith. In other words, the believer's good works are absolutely necessary to justification, although they contribute nothing meritorious to it."⁵² Edwards asked why good works are necessary. He upheld that it is not to earn salvation. Men cannot be saved by any work of their own, but without them there is no salvation. Then he says that God appointed that man should be saved in no other way. In a sermon on Galatians 5:6 he wrote:

...there is no room left for any one to say that they have faith which justifies and that they need take no care about works and so to give themselves a liberty in sinning because they ben't under the law but under grace; for tho' tis only faith that justifies yet there is no faith that justifies but a working faith; so that it is as impossible that any person should be saved without works as if they were justified upon the account of their works. It is as impossible that men should be saved without an

⁴⁷ John H. Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards, Evangelist* (Hereafter cited as *Evan.*) (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1995), 142.

⁴⁸ John H. Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Hereafter cited as *RBT.*) Vol. 3 (Orlando: Ligonier Ministries, 1993), 204.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ John H. Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards: A Mini-Theology* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1987), 61-62.

⁵² John H. Gerstner, *Evan.*, 50.

evangelical, universal and sincere obedience under the second covenant as it was that they should be saved without a perfect obedience under the first covenant.⁵³

Works under the new covenant are a necessary evidence of the faith that justifies and the basis on which Christ obtained salvation for Himself and the elect. Edwards stressed that holiness was a necessary requirement for salvation. Edwards defines, holiness, “as conformity of the heart and not merely outward conformity to God’s holy law.”⁵⁴ Edwards gives four reasons for the requirement of holiness. First, he says that it is contrary to make the wicked equally happy with those that are holy. God’s justice requires Him to punish sin.⁵⁵ Second, God cannot embrace sinful creatures. “It is therefore as impossible for an unholy thing to be admitted unto the happiness of heaven as it is for God not to be, or be turned to nothing.”⁵⁶ For God to love sin or a sinful man is an impossibility. Edwards writes:

It is impossible that God should love sin as it is for him to cease to be, and it is as impossible for him to love a wicked man that has not his sin purified. And it is as impossible for him to enjoy the happiness of heaven except God love him for the happiness of heaven consists in the enjoyment of God’s love.⁵⁷

Third, God cannot love sinful men because a love would defile God and heaven. And fourth, it is impossible that the wicked should inherit heaven. The sin nature of man makes it necessary that the sinner be unable to be truly happy. Sin is a tyrant and its nature is rebellious and therefore it could never be truly happy. An unholy person will not see heaven.

Later, Edwards had six reasons for holiness. The additions are the Holy Spirit who “promotes and infuses holiness.”⁵⁸ And Edwards spoke of love for God, the core characteristic of the believer, which makes the believer enemy to anything that is contrary to Him.

Edwards saw that faith was fruitful. The Christian lives a life of good works because faith in Christ is always accompanied with the grace to perform works in obedience to the law. Faith is infused with virtue, which every believer possesses. The Christian is not content to continue to sin; he longs to be perfectly obedient. He is not completely happy as long as sin remains. Therefore the Christian militates against sin and all costs. He does not neglect any duty and

⁵³ John H. Gerstner, *RBT*, 225-6.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁵⁵ Exod 34:3 and Num 14:18

⁵⁶ John H. Gerstner, *RBT*, 226.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

hates sins of omission and commission and makes every effort to live perfectly in this life.⁵⁹

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⁵⁹ Ibid., 228.