

IV. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

1. We believe that God has justified all sinners, that is, he has declared them righteous for the sake of Christ. This is the central message of Scripture upon which the very existence of the church depends. It is a message relevant to people of all times and places, of all races and social levels, for "the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men" (Romans 5:18). All need forgiveness of sins before God, and Scripture proclaims that all have been justified, for "the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men" (Romans 5:18).

2. We believe that individuals receive this free gift of forgiveness not on the basis of their own works, but only through faith (Ephesians 2:8,9). Justifying faith is trust in Christ and his redemptive work. This faith justifies not because of any power it has in itself, but only because of the salvation prepared by God in Christ, which it embraces (Romans 3:28; 4:5). On the other hand, although Jesus died for all, Scripture says that "whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Unbelievers forfeit the forgiveness won for them by Christ (John 8:24).

3. We believe that people cannot produce this justifying faith, or trust, in their own hearts, because "the man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him" (1 Corinthians 2:14). In fact, "the sinful mind is hostile to God" (Romans 8:7). It is the Holy Spirit who gives people faith to recognize that "Jesus is Lord" (1 Corinthians 12:3). The Holy Spirit works this faith by means of the gospel (Romans 10:17). We believe, therefore, that a person's conversion is entirely the work of God's grace. Rejection of the gospel is, however, entirely the unbeliever's own fault (Matthew 23:37).

4. We believe that sinners are saved by grace alone. Grace is the undeserved love of God for sinners. This love led God to give sinners everything they need for their salvation. It is all a gift of God. People do nothing to earn any of it (Ephesians 2:8,9).

5. We believe that already before the world was created, God chose those individuals whom he would in time convert through the gospel of Christ and preserve in faith to eternal life (Ephesians 1:4-6; Romans 8:29,30). This election to faith and salvation in no way was caused by anything in people but shows how completely salvation is by grace alone (Romans 11:5,6).

6. We believe that at the moment of death, the souls of those who believe in Christ go immediately to be with the Lord in the joy of heaven because of the atoning work of Christ (Luke 23:43). The souls of those who do not believe in Christ go to an eternity of misery in hell (Luke 16:22-24).

7. We reject every teaching that people in any way contribute to their salvation. We reject the belief that people with their own power can cooperate in their conversion or make a decision for Christ (John 15:16). We reject the belief that those who are converted were less resistant to God's grace than those who remain unconverted. We reject all efforts to present faith as a condition people must fulfill to complete their justification. We reject all attempts of sinners to justify themselves before God.

8. We reject any suggestion that the doctrine of justification by faith is no longer meaningful today.

9. We reject the teaching that believers can never fall from faith ("once saved, always saved"), because the Bible says it is possible for believers to fall from faith (1 Corinthians 10:12).

10. We reject the false and blasphemous conclusion that those who are lost were predestined, or elected, by God to damnation, for God wants all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

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11. We reject universalism, the belief that all people are saved, even those without faith in Christ (John 3:36). We reject pluralism, the belief that there are other ways to salvation besides faith in Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). We reject any teaching that says it does not matter what one believes so long as one has faith in God.

This is what Scripture teaches about justification by grace through faith. This we believe, teach and confess.