

THE TEACHING OF THE ENGLISH REFORMERS ON JUSTIFICATION

Article XI ("Of the Justification of Man") declares:

We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit (tantum propter meritum) of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings (per fidem, non propter opera et merita nostra): Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only (sola fide), is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely expressed in the Homily of Justification.

In its present form this Article was drawn up by Archbishop Parker for the Elizabethan revision of the Articles of Religion in 1563. For some of its phrases it draws upon the Lutheran Confessions of Augsburg and ^{Witten}Wittenberg. Importantly, it does not include the characteristically Lutheran assertion that men are justified by Christ through faith "when they believe that they are received into grace" (cum credunt se in gratiam recipi, Conf. Aug.art.iv)

The full exposition to which the Article refers is to be found in the Book of Homilies, in "A Sermon of the Salvation of Mankind by only Christ our Saviour from Sin and Death Everlasting". This was the work of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. Cranmer's argument can be indicated by a number of extracts from his exposition.

"Because all men be sinners and offenders against God, and breakers of his law and commandments, therefore can no man by his own acts, works, and deeds, seem they never so good, be justified and made righteous before God; but every man of necessity is constrained to seek for another righteousness or justification, to be received at God's own hands, that is to say, the remission, pardon, and forgiveness of his sins and trespasses in such things as he hath offended. And this justification or righteousness, which we so receive by God's mercy and Christ's merits, embraced by faith, is taken, accepted, and allowed of God for our perfect and full justification."

"In these foresaid places the Apostle (i.e. St Paul) toucheth specially three things, which must go together in our justification: upon God's part, his great mercy and grace; upon Christ's part, justice, that is, the satisfaction of God's justice, or the price of our redemption by the offering of his body and shedding of his blood with fulfilling of the law perfectly and throughly; and upon our part, true and lively faith in the merits of Jesu Christ; which yet is not ours but by God's working in us. So that in our justification is not only God's mercy and grace, but also his justice, which the Apostle calleth the justice of God; and it consisteth in paying our ransom and fulfilling of the law. And so the grace of God doth not shut out the justice of God in our

justification, but only shutteth out the justice of man, that is to say, the justice of our works, as to be merits of deserving our justification. And therefore St Paul declareth here nothing upon the behalf of man concerning his justification, but only a true and lively faith; which nevertheless is the gift of God, and not man's only work without God.

And yet that faith doth not shut out repentance, hope, love, dread, and the fear of God, to be joined with faith in every man that is justified; but it shutteth them out from the office of justifying. So that, although they be all present together in him that is justified, yet they justify not all together. Nor that faith also doth not shut out the justice of our good works, necessarily to be done afterward of duty towards God, (for we are most bounden to serve God in doing good deeds commanded by him in his holy Scripture all the days of our life;) but it excludeth them so that we may not do them to this intent, to be made good by doing of them. For all the good works that we can do be imperfect, and therefore not able to deserve our justification: but our justification doth come freely, by the mere mercy of God; and of so great and free mercy that, whereas all the world was not able of their selves to pay any part towards their ransom, it pleased our heavenly Father, of his infinite mercy without any our desert or deserving, to prepare for us the most precious jewels of Christ's body and blood, whereby our ransom might be fully paid, the law fulfilled, and his justice fully satisfied. So that Christ is now the righteousness of all them that truly do believe in him. He for them paid their ransom by his death. He for them fulfilled the law in his life. So that now in him and by him every true Christian man may be called a fulfiller of the law; forasmuch as that which their infirmity lacketh Christ's justice hath supplied.

"And St Ambrose, a Latin author, saith these words:

'This is the ordinance of God, that he which believeth in Christ should be saved without works, by faith only, freely receiving remission of his sins.' Consider diligently these words, Without works, by faith only, freely we receive remission of our sins. What can be spoken more plainly than to say that freely, without works, by faith only, we obtain remission of our sins? Nevertheless, this sentence, that we be justified by faith only, is not so meant of them, that the said justifying faith is alone in man, without true repentance, hope, charity, dread, and fear of God, at any time or season. Nor when they say that we be justified freely, they mean not that we should or might afterward be idle, and that nothing should be required on our parts afterward; neither they mean not so to be justified without our good works that we should do no good works at all, like as shall be more expressed at large hereafter. But this saying, that we be justified by faith only, freely, and without works, is spoken for to take away clearly all merit of our works, as being unable to deserve our justification at God's hands; and thereby most plainly to express the weakness of man and the goodness of God, the great infirmity of ourselves and the might and power of God, the imperfectness of our own works and the most abundant grace of our Saviour Christ; and thereby wholly for to ascribe the merit and deserving of our justification unto Christ only and his most precious bloodshedding.

"Justification is the office of God only; and is not a thing which we render unto him, but which we receive of him; not which we give to him, but which we take of him, by his free mercy, and by the only merits of his most dearly beloved Son,

our only Redeemer, Saviour, and Justifier, Jesus Christ. So that the true understanding of this doctrine, We be justified freely by faith without works, or that we be justified by faith in Christ only, is not that this our own act, to believe in Christ, or this our faith in Christ, which is within us, doth justify us and deserve our justification unto us; for that were to count ourselves to be justified by some act or virtue that is within ourselves. But the true understanding and meaning thereof is, that, although we hear God's word and believe it, although we have faith, hope, charity, repentance, dread, and fear of God within us, and do never so many good works thereunto, yet we must renounce the merit of all our said virtues of faith, hope, charity, and all our other virtues and good deeds, which we either have done, shall do, or can do, as things that be far too weak and insufficient and unperfect to deserve remission of our sins and our justification; and therefore we must trust only in God's mercy, and in that sacrifice which our High Priest and Saviour Christ Jesus, the Son of God, once offered for us upon the cross, to obtain thereby God's grace, and remission, as well of our original sin in baptism, as of all actual sin committed by us after our baptism, if we truly repent and turn unfeignedly to him again.

"For that faith which bringeth forth, without repentance, either evil works or no good works is not a right, pure, and lively faith, but a dead, devilish, counterfeit, and feigned faith, as St Paul and St James call it. For the right and true Christian faith is, not only to believe that holy Scripture and all the foresaid articles of our faith are true, but also to have a sure trust and confidence in God's merciful promises to be saved from everlasting damnation by Christ; whereof doth follow a loving heart to obey his commandments.

This last point is further expounded in the Homily "Of the true, lively, and Christian Faith", which was also written by Cranmer.

"The first coming unto God, good Christian people, is through faith; whereby, as it is declared in the last Sermon, we be justified before God. And, lest any man should be deceived for lack of right understanding hereof, it is diligently to be noted that faith is taken in the Scripture two manner of ways.

There is one faith which in Scripture is called dead faith; which bringeth forth no good works, but is idle, barren, and unfruitful. Another faith there is in Scripture, which is not, as the foresaid faith, idle, unfruitful, and dead, but worketh by charity, as St Paul declareth Gal.v: which, as the other vain faith is called a dead faith, so may this be called a quick or lively faith. This is the true, lively, and unfeigned Christian faith, and is not in the mouth and outward profession only, but it liveth, and stirreth inwardly in the heart. And this faith is not without hope and trust in God, nor without the love of God and of our neighbours, nor without the fear of God, nor without the desire to hear God's word, and to follow the same in eschewing evil and doing gladly all good works. This faith, as St Paul describeth it, is the sure ground and foundation of the benefits which we ought to look for and trust to receive of God, a certificate and sure looking for them, although they yet sensibly appear not unto us. And after he saith, He that cometh

to God must believe both that he is, and that he is a merciful rewarder of well doers. And nothing commendeth good men unto God so much as this assured faith and trust in him.

Of this faith three things are specially to be noted: first, that this faith doth not lie dead in the heart, but is lively and fruitful in bringing forth good works; second, that without it can no good works be done, that shall be acceptable and pleasant to God; third, what manner of good works they be that this faith doth bring forth.