

JUSTIFICATION, GOOD WORKS, AND NORMAN SHEPHERD

The Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, Chestnut Hill, Pa., was dismissed, subject to review, from the faculty following several years of debate raging around his views on the relationship between the works of Christ for the Christian, and of the Holy Spirit in and through the Christian, and of God's justification of the Christian.

In an attempt to bring harmony and to solicit the help of his peers in formulating his views, Professor Norman Shepherd submitted 34 theses to the Presbytery of Philadelphia and requested presbytery to determine if the theses are the teaching of Scripture and if it is permitted to teach them under the Westminster Standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

The presbytery, sitting as a committee of the whole, determined that 30 of the theses are the teaching of Scripture (and therefore permissible to teach in the OPC). Concerning the other four, presbytery took the following actions:

Of thesis 20, presbytery determined that it would be best not to label it as the teaching of Scripture. Such an act, it was argued, would have the effect of ruling any view other than Mr. Shepherd's as being an unacceptable interpretation of a specific and difficult verse of Scripture, namely, Romans 2:13. Presbytery determined that it is permissible to teach Mr. Shepherd's view of Romans 2:13 in the church.

On theses 25, 26 and 27, the presbytery determined, by motion, to take "no action." On thesis 25, presbytery went on record with an explanation that, "alleging that a doctrinal statement is 'Reformed doctrine' without referring it to the Scriptures or the subordinate standards of the church is not a proper test of what teachings are allowable for officers of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church." Theses 26 and 27 are similar to 25 in that they identify certain doctrinal positions as belonging to a system of doctrine (in this case "Roman Catholic") while not referring them to any recognized and authoritative statement of the system.

In an effort to encourage the readers of this journal to determine for themselves, by reading and comparing to Scripture, if the 34 theses are the teaching of Scripture, the undersigned has entered this note and the 34 theses in this journal as a paid advertisement.

The original draft of the theses included proof

texts. They have been edited out of this document. Presbytery did not take them under consideration because they were not considered to be part of the theses. In this document, certain Scriptural references remain because I understand them to be definitive of meaning rather than proof of precept. Theses 1, 7, 8 and 9 are presented here as amended by Mr. Shepherd before presbytery.

THIRTY-FOUR THESES ON JUSTIFICATION IN RELATION TO FAITH, REPENTANCE AND GOOD WORKS

1. By nature all men are sinners and are under the wrath and condemnation of God.

2. There is nothing that any man can do to save himself from condemnation or to contribute to his salvation in any sense or at any point, so that any attempt on the part of man to save himself not only fails but even serves to compound the guilt.

3. Justification is an act of God by which he forgives sinners, acquitting them of their guilt, accounts and accepts them as righteous, and bestows upon them the title to eternal life.

4. The term "justification" may be used with reference to the acquittal and acceptance of a believer at his effectual calling into union with Christ, or with reference to the state of forgiveness and acceptance with God into which the believer is ushered by his effectual calling, or with reference to God's open acquittal and acceptance of the believer at the final judgment.

5. The ground of justification or the reason or cause why sinners are justified is in no sense to be found in themselves or in what they do, but is to be found wholly and exclusively in Jesus Christ and in his mediatorial accomplishment on their behalf.

6. By faith the sinner receives and rests upon Christ and his righteousness as held forth in the gospel, and in this way is justified.

7. In the application of redemption in the case of adults, justification is by faith and the sinner must believe in order to be justified; however, the justifying verdict and the gift of faith are received *together* at the moment the sinner is united to Christ by the Holy Spirit.

8. Elect infants who are saved in infancy and other elect persons, incapable of, or prevented from exercising faith or repentance or yielding obedience to Christ, are justified when they are united to Christ by the Holy Spirit.

9. In the case of redeemed infants, justification precedes faith in time, but regeneration given together with justification in union with Christ inevitably manifests itself in the exercises of faith, repentance, and obedience to Christ as the child matures.

10. Although believers are justified by faith alone, they are never justified by a faith that is alone, because faith as a gift of the Holy Spirit is given together with all the other gifts and graces flowing from the cross and resurrection of Christ, and the exercise of faith is

co-terminous with the exercise of the other gifts and graces so that when a man begins to believe he also begins to love God and to bring that love to expression through obedience to God.

11. Justifying faith is obedient faith, that is, "faith working through love," and therefore faith that yields obedience to the commands of Scripture.

12. Faith which is not obedient faith is dead faith and neither saves nor justifies; living and active faith justifies.

13. Faith and repentance are so inextricably intertwined with each other that there cannot exist a true and saving apprehension of the mercy of Christ without a grief for and hatred of sin, a turning unto God, and a purposing and endeavoring to walk with God in all the ways of his commandments.

14. Repentance, inclusive not only of grief for and hatred of sin but also of turning from sin and endeavoring to walk with God in all the ways of his commandments, although not the ground of forgiveness, is nevertheless so necessary for all sinners, that there is no pardon without it.

15. The forgiveness of sin for which repentance is an indispensable necessity is the forgiveness of sin included in justification, and therefore there is no justification without repentance.

16. Prior to regeneration in union with Christ, sinners can neither believe, nor repent, nor perform deeds appropriate to repentance because they are dead in their trespasses and sins.

17. Regeneration is such a radical, pervasive, and efficacious transformation that it immediately registers itself in the conscious activity of the person concerned in the exercise of faith and repentance and new obedience.

18. Faith, repentance, and new obedience are not the cause or ground of salvation or justification, but are, as covenantal response to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the way in which the Lord of the Covenant brings his people into the full possession of eternal life.

19. Those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and are his disciples, who walk in the Spirit and keep covenant with God, are in a state of justification and will be justified on the day of judgment; whereas unbelieving, ungodly, unrighteous, and impenitent sinners who are covenant breakers or strangers to the covenant of grace, are under the wrath and curse of God, and on the day of judgment will be condemned to hell forever, unless they flee from the wrath to come by turning to the Lord in faith and repentance.

20. The Pauline affirmation in Romans 2:13, "the doers of the Law will be justified," is not to be understood hypothetically in the sense that there are no persons who fall into that class, but in the sense that faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ will be justified.

21. The exclusive ground of justification of the believer in the state of justification is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, but his obedience, which is simply the

perseverance of the saints in the way of truth and righteousness, is necessary to his continuing in a state of justification.

22. The righteousness of Jesus Christ ever remains the exclusive ground of the believer's justification, but the personal godliness of the believer is also necessary for his justification in the judgment of the last day.

23. Because faith which is not obedient faith is dead faith, and because repentance is necessary for the pardon of sin included in justification, and because abiding in Christ by keeping his commandments is necessary for continuing in the state of justification, good works, works done from true faith, according to the law of God, and for his glory, being the new obedience wrought by the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer united to Christ, though not the ground of his justification, are nevertheless necessary for salvation from eternal condemnation and therefore for justification.

24. The "works" (Eph. 2:9), or "works of the Law" (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16), or "righteousness of my own derived from the Law" (Phil. 3:9), or "deeds which we have done in righteousness" (Titus 3:5) which are excluded from justification and salvation, are not "good works" in the Biblical sense of works for which the believer is created in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:10), or works wrought by the indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9; Gal. 5:22-26), or works done from true faith (I Thess. 1:3), according to the law of God, and for his glory, but are works of the flesh (Gal. 3:3) done in unbelief (Gal. 3:12) for the purpose of meriting God's justifying verdict.

25. The reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone does not mean that faith in isolation or abstraction from good works justifies, but that the way of faith (faith working by love), as opposed to the "works of the law" or any other conceivable method of justification, is the only way of justification. (John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xi, 20: "Indeed, we confess with Paul that no other faith justifies 'but faith working through love' (Gal. 5:6). But it does not take its power to justify from that working of love. Indeed, it justifies in no other way but in that it leads us into fellowship with the righteousness of Christ.")

26. The Roman Catholic doctrine that justification is a process in which the unjust man is transformed into a just man by the infusion of sacramental grace confuses justification with sanctification, and contradicts the teaching of Scripture that justification is a forensic verdict of God by which the ungodly are forgiven and accepted as righteous on the ground of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ.

27. The Roman Catholic doctrine that faith merits (congruent merit) the infusion of justifying grace, and that faith formed by love and performing good works merits (condign merit) eternal life, contradicts the teaching of Scripture that justification is by grace through faith apart from the works of the law.

28. In a right use of the law, the people of God neither merit nor seek to merit anything by their obedience to God, but out of love and gratitude serve the Lord of the Covenant as sons in the household of the

Father and in this way are the beneficiaries of his fatherly goodness.

29. The proclamation of the gospel of sovereign grace must include not only a setting forth of the sufficiency and perfection of the Redeemer Jesus Christ as the only name under heaven given among men whereby they must be saved, but must also include an earnest appeal to sinners to come to Christ in faith, to forsake sin and unrighteousness, and to perform deeds appropriate to repentance.

30. Jesus Christ cannot be received as Savior without submission to him as Lord in one and the same act of faith, and he cannot be received as Savior and Lord unless he is presented as Savior and Lord in the proclamation of the gospel.

31. Because faith is called for in all gospel proclamation, exhortations to obedience do not cast men upon their own resources to save themselves, but are grounded in the promise of the Spirit to accompany the proclamation of the whole counsel of God with power so that the response of the whole man called for in the gospel is wrought in the sinner.

32. The election of God stands firm so that sinners who are united to Christ, justified, and saved, can never come into condemnation; but within the sphere of covenant life, election does not cancel out the responsibility of the believer to persevere in penitent and obedient faith since only they who endure to the end will be saved.

33. Though believers are never without sin in this life, they have no excuse for sinning inasmuch as they have died and are risen with Christ; nevertheless, their sin does not bring them into condemnation only because it is covered by the blood of Jesus to which the believer has continual recourse in prayer.

34. The justification, sanctification, and life of the

believer reside wholly and exclusively in Christ Jesus, and therefore the proclamation of the sole-sufficiency and all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ is a source of perpetual assurance, encouragement, and comfort to believers in their warfare against Satan in obedience to Jesus Christ.

The undersigned is not neutral in this issue. I would place myself firmly in the line of those who proclaim that redemption is wholly by the grace of God. I believe that Professor Shepherd's theses (excepting perhaps 8 and 9) are an excellent and systematic explanation of the relationship between faith, repentance, and good works in the justification of the sinner. I believe that God has, in fact, in history, fulfilled the prophecy and promise of Ezekiel 36:16-28. Sin is of man. The promise and the deliverance are of God. Praise to his holy name.

My hope is nothing else than the trustworthiness of God's promise. Faith, repentance, and good works are products of the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of God's saints. Justification is an act of God based on the merit of Christ.

An additional document, provided to presbytery by Professor Shepherd, in order to foster understanding of his views, is a 22-page paper entitled *The Grace of Justification*. This paper is available to the readers of this journal (at no cost—so long as my supply holds out). Please address your requests to the undersigned. Your comments and response to this advertisement, especially if based on an evaluation in the light of Scripture, would be welcome.

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[PAID ADVERTISEMENT]

Repentance—from p. 7

alike, they bear a different meaning.

The first verb carries more of the idea of regret. When a man exercises what this Greek verb speaks of, it means that he is sorry for what he has done. The other verb signifies a changing of the mind; it is the characteristic New Testament word for repentance. Thus one could have regret for a wrong he had committed and yet not truly repent of it.

If our regret develops into a fundamental change of attitude or thinking on our part, then it becomes repentance.

Judas is the illustration of regret that did not become repentance. Judas had betrayed his Lord for 30 pieces of silver. Then he became appalled at

what he had done. He bemoaned himself and said: "I have sinned. I have betrayed innocent blood." He returned the money to the high priest, but instead of turning his steps to Jesus to ask forgiveness he went and hanged himself. He was overcome with remorse. But it was only regret; there was no genuine repentance.

In the passage before us the apostle uses both of these words. Here among the Corinthians there was sorrow for sin, but it also became a repentance of the kind that was deep and real, a change of mind. The godly sorrow was in them working a repentance not to be repented of, says the apostle.

What does this mean more specifically as far as you and I are concerned? It means that the whole inner person is affected. Our feelings are involved.

We have no hesitancy to speak of emotion in conversion. If preaching makes no appeal to our emotions, it does not supply full motivation. Psychology has made us understand the intimate connection between our emotions and the taking of significant action. To dwell upon the sinfulness of men's lives and to induce them to tremble at the thought of facing a just God is a sound approach.

I am saying, however, that repentance must go beyond that kind of response if it is to be Biblical repentance. Our mind must be affected, for example. A new pattern of thinking must appear. There must be new thoughts about God, so that we realize that God is concerned about sin, that God is concerned about each sinner.

We must be made to realize that