

Justification and the Old Testament

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“To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” –Acts 10:43

Introduction

According to the Westminster Confession, Chapter XI, section 6, “The justification of believers under the Old Testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament. (Gal. 3:9,13–14, Rom. 4:22–24, Heb. 13:8)¹ By “in all these respects,” we may understand the Confession to be saying the following:

- Old Testament believers were pardoned and their persons accepted as righteous by virtue of the obedience and satisfaction of Christ imputed unto them. As a consequence of this, Old Testament believers enjoyed, or at least had the grounds for enjoying, the blessings of the justified. From Paul’s exposition of justification in Romans 5-8 we understand these blessings to include peace with God, access to Him, rejoicing in hope of His glory, rejoicing even in suffering, the operations of Providence and of the special inward operations of the Holy Spirit bringing about the preservation and perseverance of the faith of God’s elect. Only the justified can truly be said to enjoy these things, others being in a state of condemnation and curse.
- The instrument of that justification was “their receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness.” The question naturally arises, how were these people to receive and rest on Christ prior to his birth in Bethlehem.

¹ *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, (Oak Harbor, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996), S. Chapter X, 4

- As in the New Testament, the faith of Old Testament believers was a fruit of the Spirit, who works in them “to will and to do of His good pleasure,” and produces in them other spiritual graces. This is no “faith without works.”
- The Old Testament saints, like the New, might fall under God’s fatherly displeasure and discipline but could not fall from the state of justification. Although not stated in this part of the Confession, we should also expect to find, as we find in the New Testament, that the visible people of God are a mixture of the truly justified with non-believers and that scriptural statements pertaining to the apostasy of the nation in general or of those with “temporary faith”² do not contradict the perseverance of the truly justified.

The Old and New Testament texts cited in the paragraph strongly support this teaching. The question is, does the Old Testament itself provide any further support for this view of justification in the Old Testament. Indeed it does, as will be clear when we have seen that Old Testament believers enjoyed the grace of justification, that they were justified by faith, and that the nature and object of that justifying faith is the same as that of saints in the New Testament.

As Christians we not only find no difficult with turning to the New Testament as our guide for the interpretation of the Old, but we insist upon it. Others may think it more scholarly to ignore the fact that our Lord, over the course of forty days after the resurrection (not to mention his teaching relevant to this before his passion), delivered to his apostles the unquestionably valid exposition of the entire Old Testament’s depiction of his person and work and, presumably, of the relation of the Old Testament believers to himself,³ but we think it not only poor scholarship but folly to do so for two fairly obvious reasons. The New Testament authors, as faithful disciples of Christ, have delivered

² “Temporary faith” is a term used by Reformed theologians to identify the “faith” of those who, as in the parable of the soils, make a response to the Word of God, but do not show the inalienable characteristics of true regeneration. It is a natural, superficial response, in which the nature is not changed. See Calvin’s expositions of the parable of the soils in his *Harmony of the Gospels*, Vol. 2. See especially Thomas Goodwin, *Works VI: Book 7 of The Work of the Holy Spirit in our Salvation* for an exhaustive exposition of “temporary believers.”

³ John 5:39; Luke 24:26-27, 32, 44-46; Acts 3:18; 1Peter 1:11

to us the Lord's own infallible perspective on the subject of Old Testament salvation. Furthermore, the apostles treated it as a matter of crucial importance, an apologetic platform, that their teaching was no novelty but a continuation of true Old Testament faith and a fulfillment of the true Old Testament expectation.⁴

In the fourth chapter of Romans, the apostle Paul asks and answers these two questions: 1) what was gained by Abraham and David, and 2) how did it come to them. Let us begin our inquiry at the same place.

I. Old Testament Believers Enjoyed The Grace Of Justification.

A. What Old Testament Saints Enjoyed

First, what was gained, obtained, found, by Abraham?⁵ What was the blessing of being accounted righteous? He is greatly blessed, David says, "whose lawless deeds are forgiven, whose sins are covered, against whom the Lord *will not count his sin.*" Paul goes on to say that Abraham and his offspring, his spiritual offspring by faith, will be the "heirs of the world." Somehow, necessarily and closely related to the theme of justification, then, is eschatological fulfillment, the promise of paradise regained.

What did Abraham obtain? Like other Old Testament saints he enjoyed peace with God,⁶ a prerequisite for communion with God, his friend, his shield and exceeding

⁴See for example, Acts 2:16-38; 3:13, 18-25; 5:30f.; Stephens entire speech in Acts 7; 8:35; 13:16-41; 15:15-17; 17:2-3, 10-11; 24:14-15; 26:6-7, 22,23,27; 28:23; Romans 1:2, 17; 3:21; all of chapter 4.

⁵ I am treating "according to the flesh" to be descriptive of "our father" rather than "hath found." Ultimately, it does not change the overall teaching of the passage, for Abraham did not "find" anything through the flesh, but through faith he obtained justification. See the exposition of Romans 4:1-5 in John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.) *in loc.*

⁶ Consider the oft used expression for the deceased, "he went to his fathers in peace," the "peace offerings," Judges 6:23-24; Ps. 85:8; 119:165; Isa. 9:6-7; 26:3,12; 32:17-18; 48:17,18, 21; 53:5; 54:10, 13-14; Mal. 2:5-6;

great reward. God shared with him His plans⁷ for “the friendship,” or secret counsel “of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant” (Ps. 25:14). He in turn, having “obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand” (Rom. 5:2), came with a bold reverence to the throne of grace in intercession for a city doomed to destruction. Abraham “saw my day,” says Christ, “and was glad” (John 8:56). If this seems contradictory to Matthew 13:17--“Truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it,”—Hebrews 11:13 provides a sufficient clarification: “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.” That is, they longed to see the things promised (Him!) with “my eyes,”⁸ but for the present, they must walk by faith, not by sight. Nevertheless, faith provided them with such a vision that they were able to “greet them from afar.” Like the other Old Testament faithful, Abraham enjoyed the privilege of being in a relationship of signed and sealed covenanted faithfulness with a speaking, working, redeeming God, upon whose name he could call in confidence. God, through his Word, quickened Abraham and Sarah (even physically), to receive the firstfruit of God’s promise of world redemption in his son Isaac. He obtained a knowledge of the God who can promise descendants as numerous as the stars, and a trust in that God’s power to resurrect the sacrificed father of that host. By the same faith he was enabled to leave the present world and seek and ultimately attain a heavenly one, a city whose architect and builder is God.⁹

⁷ Compare Gen. 18:17-19 with John 15:15

⁸ “And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall *see* God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another” (Job 19:26-27).

⁹ Romans 4:16-20; Heb. 11:8-19; Genesis 15

David, whose iniquity was covered, and to whom the Lord did not impute sin, certainly enjoyed a great assurance of the full pardon and cleansing of his sin, the comfort of the Spirit, and the certainty of the inheritance of the world to come. Other blessings included confidence in the preserving surrounding providence of God whose $\tau\psi\eta$ will make him conqueror over his spiritual and physical foes (32: 6-10, cf., Romans 8), and give him reason to “be glad in the Lord and rejoice.” His heart is glad in the Lord, he trusts in His holy name and, like Paul (Philippians 3:3), making “his boast in the Lord,” his face is radiant. He has tasted and seen that the Lord is good. Like Asaph, he can speak of the God who is good to Israel and join him in saying to God,

I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever (Psalm 73:23-26).

Unlike Luther before his conversion, who hated God because of the oppressive weight of His righteousness, David is able to say, “my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise” (Psalm 51:14, 15).

Summarizing the testimony from the rest of the Old Testament the following points are clear: Old Testament saints had forgiveness of sins, rejoiced in God’s righteousness (which they could not do unless they, as sinners, had been justified), had fellowship with God, looking on His face and tasting of His love (which they could not do unless they as sinners had been justified), experienced the soul transforming work of the Spirit (which they could not do unjustified), looked forward to the coming of God’s Messiah (which again they could not do without presumption if unjustified).¹⁰ Indeed, there

¹⁰ Ps. 16:11; 89:15; 34:8; Song 2:3; Ezek. 39:29; Nehemiah 9:20;

are clear differences between the Old and New Testaments, and the New Testament is superior (Heb. 7:11 – 10:18), but with respect to the benefits of justification, there is little enjoyed by the New Testament saint which was not enjoyed by those of the Old Testament except with respect to degree, clarity, comfort of assurance and freedom from certain features of the Old Testament pedagogy (Galatians 4:1-7).¹¹

II. Justification Terminology

What does the Old Testament mean by “justify?” The word is used in several different ways. First, it is used in defense, as in Genesis 44:16, where Judah asks Joseph, “What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear (justify) ourselves.” That is, “What could we say, we that are guilty, to be as if we had not sinned; to be in your eyes as if we had acted with integrity.” God says he will not acquit, justify, the wicked. Why? Because it would be unjust, not according to the norm (i.e., his own nature) to do so. Hence, in Deuteronomy 25:1, the term is used of the judge, that he must acquit the innocent and condemn the guilty,” i.e., treat as guilty, worthy of punishment, those who are, and acknowledge the righteousness of the righteous by acquitting, and thus vindicating them (cf., Exodus 23:7; Psalm 82:3; Prov. 17:15; Isa., 5:23). The judge does not *make* them righteous, but affirms that they are so, and are to be treated accordingly. In this way also, Judah justifies Tamar (Gen. 38:26). God is appealed to act (1 Kings 8:32; 2 Sam. 15:4; 21:4), persons argue in their defense, and witnesses are often called in order to gain this objective of establishing one’s righteousness, i.e., of justifying oneself (Job 13:18; 33:32; Isaiah 43:26). God is said to be justified when men acknowl-

¹¹ Consider the argument presented in a previous RCF paper, *The Trinity as the Ground of All Comfortable Communion with God*, in which I argued that assurance and the comfort of our communion with God grew as the revelation of the Trinity was made more clear.

edge the rightness of God despite his apparent inaction (Jer. 12:1), in his condemnation of the guilty (Psalm 51:4), and in his vindication of the righteous, or of the deeds of the righteous *as* righteous. An example of this latter is the case of Phinehas who thrust a spear through an Israelite and a Moabite woman: “it was counted to him as righteousness from generation to generation forever” (Ps. 106). It is not being said of Phinehas that *he* was declared to be a perfectly righteous man, but that this deed, by appearance a rash act of a vigilante extremist, inappropriate for a priest, was, in fact, a righteous act which was vindicated in God’s turning back his wrath from the people and God granting to him and to his descendents a covenant of perpetual priesthood.¹² By any of these definitions, to justify does not mean to actually make righteous, but either to *acknowledge already present righteousness*, or to *vindicate* someone who has been righteous. Finally, there are those cases when God justifies those who are clearly *ungodly*, such as the many iniquitous sinners, who are justified by his Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53, or the publican praying for mercy in the temple and going down to his house justified in Luke 18.

There are some mysteries which are faintly hinted at in the Old Testament, but not clearly and powerfully revealed until the New, such as the inclusion, on the same footing, of the Gentiles in the church. There is some similarity between this feature and the question of the justification of the ungodly. There is no problem with the idea of justifying the just, or the *apparently* unjust, but how do we explain how a God “who will by no means clear the guilty,” is nevertheless a God “forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin.” The final answer, of course, is, according to Paul,

¹²Herman Witsius: “It was judged that he had acted in a due and regular manner, and was therefore more worthy of praise and reward, than of blame and punishment.” *Theo Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*, (Escondido, California: The den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1990 reprint) I: 398.

the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."¹³

But this is by no means a "mystery," like the status of the believing Gentiles, but an expectation built into the warp and woof of Old Testament life, like the fabric of every priestly garment, and hammered out, like gold plating on the tabernacle furniture, into every aspect of Old Testament piety: the conjoined principles of representation, imputation, substitution, and satisfaction.

The principles of surety, representation, and the ideas of "reckoning," "counting," "imputing" or "laying something to the charge of" someone else are pervasive in the Old Testament. God tells Abraham that his offspring will be counted through Isaac, and later, this numbering is further determined through Jacob and then the remnant from among the Israelites until finally it is identified as Jews and Gentiles who have *the faith* of Abraham. Judah becomes a surety for Benjamin, bearing the blame forever if he fails to restore him to Jacob. Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh are reckoned to be Jacob's (Genesis 48:5). The person who eats the meat of his sacrifice after 3 days will not have his sacrifice credited to him, but he shall bear his iniquity. The man who kills his beast without bringing it to the entrance of the tent of meeting shall have "blood guilt" imputed to him (Lev. 7:18; 17:4). On the other hand, blood guilt might be removed. This principle is vividly illustrated in the removal of blame for unsolved murder in Deuteronomy chapter 21:

"If in the land that the LORD your God is giving you to pos-

¹³ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version*. Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001, S. Ro 3:24-26

sess someone is found slain, lying in the open country, and it is not known who killed him, ² then your elders and your judges shall come out, and they shall measure the distance to the surrounding cities. ³ And the elders of the city that is nearest to the slain man shall take a heifer that has never been worked and that has not pulled in a yoke. ⁴ And the elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with running water, which is neither plowed nor sown, and shall break the heifer's neck there in the valley. ⁵ Then the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come forward, for the LORD your God has chosen them to minister to him and to bless in the name of the LORD, and by their word every dispute and every assault shall be settled. ⁶ And all the elders of that city nearest to the slain man shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley, ⁷ and they shall testify, 'Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it shed. ⁸ Accept atonement, O LORD, for your people Israel, whom you have redeemed, and do not set the guilt of innocent blood in the midst of your people Israel, so that their blood guilt be atoned for.' ⁹ So you shall purge the guilt of innocent blood from your midst, when you do what is right in the sight of the LORD. ¹⁴

In the redemption of a piece of land or a slave, the value of the redemption price is to be calculated based on the years remaining until the Jubilee (Lev. 25:50). The word translated calculated is the same word used of God's imputation of righteousness to believing Abraham—אָפֶּיַד—to "credit, account, reckon, impute, i.e., keep accounting records (Gen 15:6; Ps 32:2)."¹⁵ The contribution which the Levites give to the Lord, even though it was given to them, shall be accounted as from the winepress or the threshing floor, i.e., as if they offered the produce of their own hands. They are not cheating God by offering a tithe of the tithe they had received. Using the same word, Shimei the son of Gera, confessing his sin, begs the returning King David not to "hold me guilty," or "impute iniquity unto me." It is used to attribute someone as belonging to a certain tribe in a genealo-

¹⁴*The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Dt 21:1-14.

¹⁵Swanson, James: *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)*. electronic ed. Oak Harbor : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, S. DBLH 3108, #4

gy, whether or not they were actually, physically, of that tribe. Those who object to the Reformed doctrine of justification as a piece of “celestial book-keeping” may find themselves objecting to a principle which God Himself, in assorted contexts and levels had encouraged. While sin must necessarily be punished, a person’s worthiness of punishment or of reward is not naturally intrinsic (bound physically) and absolute; it is something covenantal, to be determined by a judge in relation to law, and may, by that legislator/judge, be “transferable.”

The actual transfer of guilt, i.e., of liability to punishment, from one to another, from the sinner to the innocent sin-bearer was inculcated into the piety of our first parents and codified into every aspect of the Mosaic religious system of the nation of Israel. The demonstration of the effects of that transfer is the rationale for every ceremony of the tabernacle. It is not too great an exaggeration to say that every activity of the priest is either the demonstration, application of explanation of this principle. His job was to remove guilt (Lev. 10:17), to be the instrument of that God who “removes our transgressions from us.” Instruments they are, for even they, as in the case of Joshua the priest, need to have their iniquity taken away and be clothed “with pure vestments” (Zechariah 3; Hebrews 9). The presence of God with his people, their enjoyment of Him, the continuation of their individual and corporate lives was utterly dependent upon the maintenance of a guiltless state through ceremonies which, if not directly bloody, were founded upon the ceremonial transfer of guilt to a substitute, the execution of justice on that guilt in the shedding of the blood of that substitute, and the application of that blood (or the ashes of a sacrificed animal in anointing oil) to the guilty party, signifying that justice has been served and the recipient is justified: ceremonially—in the outward cleansing that restores

outward access to the religious community, and actually—where genuine faith and repentance are present, that restores true spiritual communion with God. This brings us to the instrument of justification.

III. The Instrument of Justification: Faith in Christ

How, according to Paul, was this blessedness of the state of justification attained? Through faith. It is instructive to see Paul's use of circumcision in this respect. Circumcision is not a source of righteousness, nor a condition of righteousness, but "a seal of righteousness by faith." In this regard, Paul taught that the circumcision which Abraham received, and by inference, all after Abraham, was something that was always an objective word, a physical sermon, which, if seen rightly, always reaffirmed the promise of justification by faith through grace only. Someone might argue that it was quite convenient for Paul to take two men out of the Old Testament and a couple of verses of theirs as proof-texts of his doctrine, but does the entire Old Testament bear this out. Indeed, it does.

The important question is, what was the *object* of faith under the OT? Was it faith in Christ and if so, how was it exercised? What did the exercise of faith do? In general, the first object of the faith of God's people is God himself, as He was known in creation and in the special verbal revelation of Himself in the garden of Eden. This was a revelation of the divine attributes, God's eternal power and godhead, and of his positive commandment that men, cleaving to one spouse, should be fruitful and multiply, subdue the earth by labor, remember their creator by honoring the Sabbath day, and refrain from eating from a specific tree. Beyond these specifics, whatever God required of man, i.e., the moral law, was written on his heart. Therefore, the object of faith was God as

revealed, and the act of faith was to believe God, that He is and is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him, and to believe what He said. The result of genuine faith in Him would be that man would honor him as Father and Lord through acts of loving, trusting, reverent obedience. Furthermore, as God had revealed Himself to be the punisher of them that disobey (“in the day you eat of it you shall surely die”), faith would also have issued in a reverent fear of sin against him. The first part of the Confession’s definition of faith is appropriate for man in paradise:

By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God Himself speaking therein; (John 4:42, 1 Thess. 2:13, 1 John 5:10, Acts 24:14) and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth; yielding obedience to the commands, (Rom. 16:26) trembling at the threatenings, (Isa. 66:2) and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come. (Heb. 11:13, 1 Tim. 4:8)¹⁶

After the fall, however, a new attribute of God is revealed, man is directed to a new object of faith, and he is introduced to a new form of worship, the divinely provided means of perpetuating in man the knowledge of the consequences of sin and the hope of redemption by a substitute. The attribute is grace, for prior to the fall and the subsequent confrontation of man in his state of apostasy, there had been no need for, nor revelation of, divine pardoning mercy. Henceforth, it will be a principle part of the faith of God’s elect that “there is forgiveness with Him, that He may be feared, and with the Lord is plenteous redemption.” Of equal importance, however, is the fact that the pardoning mercy of God is inextricably bound up with the notion of a divine redeemer and substitute. This is initially seen in the fact that all hope for Adam and Eve, whose bodies

¹⁶*The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996), Chapter XIV, 2.

are doomed to die and whose world is cursed, is in the promised serpent-crusher who was, in pre-Christian rabbinical commentary identified as the divine Messiah. It appears that Eve thought this was her first child, אִישׁ אֶתְהוּהָ, “ a man, the Lord” Furthermore, God introduced a new form of divine worship, the slaying of an animal for a burnt offering in the sacrifice of a substitute. This act of sacrifice done rightly, i.e., as an expression of faith with the due humiliation and gratitude which would inevitably follow such sincere faith, was carried on by Abel, maintained by the faithful, perverted into pagan sacrificial practice, reformed and highly regulated under Moses, perverted further into both idolatrous practice and barren ceremonialism by Israel, but the practice was never recinded to the people of God until the anti-type of animal sacrifices was finally offered up. Even afterwards, in the taking up of divinely prescribed symbols of the substitute’s body and blood, the object of this faith and hope is still sacramentally held out before believers.

A. Faith and Justification from Adam to Moses.

To rightly understand the relationship of faith and righteousness and blessedness in the lives of the saints prior to the giving of the law we turn first to the inspired commentary on the subject in Hebrews 11:

⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. ⁵ By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. ⁷ By faith Noah, being

warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

Hebrews is not a treatise on a debate between salvation by works vs. salvation by grace so much as it is a plea for the preservation of the Hebrew Christians' faith-response to the revelation delivered by Christ, based on the more general premise that salvation has always been dependent to this faith-response to whatever God has revealed. The argument is that now that God has spoken to us in his Son, saving faith will issue in the due response of appropriating Christ as God's everlasting High Priest, adhering to his word as God's final prophet speaking from heaven, and committing one's soul to the care of this universal Lord in forsaking the world, fearing not the opposition of His enemies, and adhering to Him even unto death. The author's argument is that this is what faith in God does with God's revelation of Himself. Hebrews chapter eleven is a running demonstration of the truth of this fact down through the ages.

Beginning with Able, the author argues that by faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice. The sacrifice was more acceptable because it was the sacrifice that demonstrated the faith of the sacrificer, faith in the God who had appointed the sacrifice as the means of drawing near to God. The righteousness of Abel was "commended," i.e., God testified concerning him, vindicating the righteousness of him and his way of worship, by accepting his sacrifice.¹⁷ These words might easily be understood in either the Pauline or the Jacobean sense, Paul saying that Abel was justified, that he pleased God, that he had attained blessing, by grace, through the faith he had in the God who had appointed the sacrifice, and James saying that he was *demonstrably* a faithful man by his

¹⁷ δι ἧς ἐμαρτυρήθη εἶναι δίκαιος, μαρτυροῦντος ἐπὶ τοῖς δώροις αὐτοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ

work of offering up the acceptable sacrifice. The author of Hebrews subtly, we do not say intentionally, sidesteps the Paul/James apparent difficulty by asserting something true in either case, that God testified concerning Abel that he was righteous, and did so by accepting his sacrifice. Also, of great significance, we see here, at the outset, the import bearing which the state of the heart and mind have upon the acceptability of works of religious worship. Later in their history, God will make it clear that even the offering of animal sacrifice is empty and offensive if not done in the appropriate condition of the heart.

After the great apostasy reported in Genesis four, the next persons to be identified as being godly in any sense are the contemporaries of Seth's son Enosh: "at that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD." This calling upon the name of the Lord is an act of faith, grounded upon the prior revelation of that name, closely bound up with the covenantal promise and the sacrifice. To "call upon the name of the Lord" is not to cry out to a hypothetical supreme being to help from somewhere out there, but to act faith upon a speaking covenanting Redeemer.¹⁸

The next believer of note is Enoch, who by faith pleased God, because of his faith walked with God, and by faith was taken up. The object of his faith was also this promising God, which promise of the coming One Enoch embraced and testified against the ungodliness of his age:

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all

¹⁸ See Genesis 12:8; 13:4; 21:33; 26:25; Exodus 34:5; 1 Kings 18 (where Elijah contrasts the vain cries to the absentee god of the prophets of Baal by his confident appeal to the LORD, who called the fathers of the tribes of Israel, delivered to them His word, and was even then turning their children's hearts back to himself), Psalm 116; Joel 2:32; Zephaniah 3:9; Acts 2:21; Acts 15:17; Acts 22:16; Romans 10:13; and 1 Cor. 1:2.

their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him (Jude 14, 15).

It might be objected that the text shows that Enoch's faith was in a coming judge as opposed to a sin-bearing divine Messiah, but such a remark ignores the fact that in Enoch was still alive the remembrance of the significance of the sacrifice. Also, what is certain is that his faith was based on revelation and that it was looking forward to the coming of the one who would bring about salvation. This is also clear in the naming of Methuselah's grandson Noah, saying, "Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands" (Genesis 5:28-9), another, albeit misplaced, certain reference to the one promised to Adam and Eve.

This brings us to Noah and his righteousness. The scripture tells us that he "found favor in the eyes of the Lord" and goes on to say that he "was a righteous man, blameless in his generation," and that he "walked with God," and that "by faith "Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith" (Hebrews 11:7). It is not so clear from this text at this point that the Scripture is teaching the doctrine of justification by faith only, but what is abundantly clear is that the faith associated with becoming an heir of righteousness is one which causes a believer to tremble at the threatenings of God, and moves him into action, even vigorous, patient, persevering, world-condemning action. These are the two great points of the Hebrews 11 commentary on the faith of the Old Testament saints: there was no pleasing God without it, and those who had it did not have it as an idle, or passive, or "bare" intellectual assent or emotional feeling, but as something which moved them to

ⁿ Gen. 6:13-22; Luke 17:26; 1 Pet. 3:20

act, to suffer, to wait, to work and to persevere. Again, with Noah as with all the Old Testament saints, and the more vividly as time goes on, faith (the faith by which they become heirs of the righteousness which is by faith) is bound up with the God who deals covenantally with his people: “Everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you” (Genesis 6:17-19). What did he know of Christ? We don’t know just how much, we know that he looked forward to the time when the sons of Japheth would dwell in the tents of Shem, which we take to be an early reference to the Gentile inclusion in the church and a testimony to the primacy of the sons of Shem (Israel in particular) in the redemptive purpose of God. We also know that the Spirit of Christ preached through him unto his contemporaries, those who subsequently perished in the flood. And we know that he observed the making of animal sacrifice which, presumably, as he was in the line of the faithful, was done with the same faith as it was when performed by Abel. The principle of “clean” and “unclean” animals for sacrifice was already established, though we have not been told when.

The next great period of the revelation of Christ, with greater clarity concerning him was in the divine calling and covenanting with Abram. Here the object of faith becomes identified as the offspring of Abraham, in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed. The removal of sin within the context of the blood-covenant relationship, together with the sovereignty of grace, is illustrated in the institution of circumcision. The fact of substitution is maintained in the Abrahamic sacrifices, and the principle of substitution is further illustrated in the ram which is sacrificed instead of Isaac. The principle of a mediator between God and man was already present as seen in the priesthood of Melchisedek. The person of God the Redeemer and sustainer of His people, i.e., the

second person of the Trinity as the mediator between God and man engaged in the redemption of his people and the judge of the wicked is revealed in the one who is “the Lord sent by the Lord” to Abraham. The mediator between heaven and earth appears to Jacob, and later this Angel of the Covenant wrestles with the patriarch. This is the God who will be with them in Egypt and bring them out, and who will one day receive the scepter that will not depart from Judah.

As already noted, it is trust not only in the mercy of God, but in God-on-the-mercy-seat, which is the object of faith under Moses. That is, nearly the whole of Mosaic ceremonial law, the basis for all true piety under this dispensation, is concerned with teaching about Christ, so that whether a penitent is approaching a priest, laying his hands on the head of a sacrifice, receiving the sprinkling of blood, eating of a Passover or other fellowship offering, seeking a cure for leprosy, fleeing to a city of refuge, or even delivering his city from unknown bloodguilt he was acting faith on Christ as revealed. All the while, he is encountering Christ and exercising faith in Him in further redemptive activities: in the Angel of the Presence, the fiery cloudy pillar, the water-bearing rock, the Captain of the Lord’s host, and typologically and “virtually” in the persons of those Judges, Prophets, Priests and Kings who deliver, speak, propitiate and rule in His name and Spirit.

In the prophecy of Isaiah, his birth, anointed calling, office, ministry, life, death, victory, and everlasting reign are vividly portrayed. Specifically, his role as the source of righteousness is clearly expressed. To a people of whom it is said, “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags,” Isaiah tells them, Only in the LORD are my righteousnesses” (45:24) The full passage says,

²² “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall confess to God. ²⁴Only in the LORD, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength; to him shall come and be ashamed all who were incensed against him. ²⁵In the LORD all the offspring of Israel shall be justified and shall glory.”

Which is expounded by Paul of Christ (Philippians 2:11; 3:9).

Likewise, Jeremiah tells us that the name of the “righteous branch” to be raised up for the salvation of his people is, “the LORD our righteousness.” Describing this term, John Owen reminds us,

This promise was first given when we had lost our original righteousness, and were considered only as those who had sinned and come short of the glory of God. In this estate a righteousness was absolutely necessary, that we might be again accepted with God; for without a righteousness, yea, that which is perfect and complete, we never were so, nor ever can be so. In this estate it is promised that he shall be our “righteousness;” or, as the apostle expresses it, “the end of the law for righteousness to them that do believe.” ...

Relating this to the Psalm 71:16, “I will make mention of thy righteousness, thine only (צִדְקֹתֶיךָ לְבַדְּךָ) he says,

The redoubling of the affix¹⁹ excludes all confidence and trusting in any thing but the righteousness of God alone. For this the apostle affirms to be the design of God in making Christ to be righteousness unto us, — namely, “that no flesh should glory in his presence; but that he that glorieth, should glory in the Lord,” 1 Corinthians 1:29, 31. For it is by faith alone making mention, as unto our justification, of the righteousness of God, of his righteousness only, that excludes all boasting, Romans 3:27. And, besides what shall be farther pleaded from particular testimonies, the Scripture

¹⁹ Redoubling of the affix” refers to pronominal suffix on the Hebrew word which, in Psalm 71:16 indicates possession by the second person singular and is translated in English, “thy righteousness, thine only.” צִדְקֹתֶיךָ לְבַדְּךָ :



does eminently declare how he is “The LORD our Righteousness,” — namely, in that he “makes an end of sin and reconciliation for iniquity, and brings in everlasting righteousness,” Daniel 9:24. For by these things is our justification completed, — namely, in satisfaction made for sin, the pardon of it in our reconciliation unto God, and the providing for us an everlasting righteousness. Therefore is he “The LORD our Righteousness,” and so rightly called. Wherefore, seeing we had lost original righteousness, and had none of our own remaining, and stood in need of a perfect, complete righteousness to procure our acceptance with God, and such a one as might exclude all occasion of boasting of anything in ourselves, the Lord Christ being given and made unto us “The LORD our Righteousness,” in whom we have all our righteousness (our own, as it is ours, being as filthy rags in the sight of God); and this by making an end of sin, and reconciliation for iniquity, and bringing in everlasting righteousness: it is by his righteousness, by his only, that we are justified in the sight of God, and do glory. This is the substance of what in this case we plead for; and thus it is delivered in Scripture, in a way bringing more light and spiritual sense into the minds of believers than those philosophical expressions and distinctions which vaunt themselves with a pretense of propriety and accuracy. (Works 5:297, 298)

As this exercise of faith continues through the years, the knowledge of the *object* of faith is brought into ever clearer focus through the work of the prophets who encourage repentance and, later, patience in hope by holding before the people so vivid and detailed a description of the Messiah that even after 400 years of no new revelation, Jesus is able to be manifested to a people prepared, waiting for the Consolation of Israel. The discouraged, imprisoned, John the Baptist only needs to hear what Jesus is doing to be reassured that this is, indeed, the expected One. Jesus is able to say to his scripturally educated opponents, “the Scriptures testify of me.” E. W. Hengstenberg wrote,

When we observe that the Messianic announcements, which are peculiar to Israel alone, have their origin in the primeval age, that for many successive centuries they continue to

reappear again and again, that they do not occur merely incidentally and in an isolated form, in the midst of other prophecies, but constitute the very center and soul of all prophecy, that they stand out in great prominence even in the Psalms, in which utterance is given to the living faith of the people of God, under the quickening influence of the law and the prophets, we cannot for a moment doubt, that to the people of the ancient covenant the anticipation of a Messiah must have been one of all-absorbing importance.²⁰

IV. The Character of Old Testament Faith

Hopefully, the reader is convinced that Christ, seen in the shadows, models, schematics, previews, etc., of the Old Testament was the object of Old Testament faith. The question before us now is what was the character of that faith? Was it “their receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness” or something else? To be sure, as is evident from the Apostle’s use of Old Testament figures in Hebrews eleven, by looking at the character of their faith we can gain some insight into the meaning of faith for New Testament believers.

First, their faith was spiritual, as opposed to carnal. That is, regeneration, effectual calling, a spirit quickening work of divine monergism was as necessary under the Old Testament as it is today. This is why Jesus expressed the incongruity that Nicodemus, a teacher in Israel, in a theologically mature stage in the history of the Old Testament, should express ignorance of the new birth. The new birth could not have been a new idea.

This new birth, then, was a renewing of the heart. As everything, all the issue of life, springs from the heart, the life of the Old Testament believer began with the heart—the circumcised heart, the sprinkled heart, the heart of flesh exchanged for the natural

²⁰ *The Christology of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1861) IV: 259.

heart of stone. One needs only to survey the scriptural description of the *un*-renewed heart to see that it is not the heart from which faith comes.

Secondly, seeing it is a faith arising from a renewed heart, it is not a faith which is alone. Their faith was the farthest thing from a mere mental assent to propositions. It was a faith which was a feature of “the fear of the Lord.” That is, it believed the word of God “for the authority of the One speaking therein,” and therefore, felt (emotionally), and acted (actively or passively) accordingly. Faith entailed, therefore, “an affectionate reverence,” to God. Consequently, it was a faith that produced the following effects: 1) obedience to God’s word, whether it was a word of calling, or an instruction for some task, 2) humility, 3) boldness, 4) delight 5) contentment and rest and 6) perseverance and submission, and 7) heights of joy. While unbelief might resist the most amazing displays of extraordinary divine intervention, this saving faith might be initiated or revived by the miraculous, but might also consist across a lifetime without it. It was a faith subject to growth, declension and revival, for the growth and maintenance of which God had prescribed means.

V. Application

The great design, whose lines are drawn in the face, and whose substance lies in the bowels of the Old Testament, and which is the spirit that enlivens the whole doctrine and story of it, the bond of union wherein all the parts do centre, without which they would be loose, scattered, and deformed heaps, is the bringing forth of the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Without an apprehension of this design, and faith therein, neither can a letter of it be understood, nor can a rational man discover any important excellency in it. Him it teacheth and prophesieth about, him it calls all men to desire and expect (Owen, *Works*, 18:370).

A. To the Non-Christian

While we might want to express it in more modern terms, the point John Owen makes is critically important to the non-Christian in this relativistic, pluralistic world. By reminding him that from the very beginning God has only dealt with man through this one mediator, in a way of grace, that Christ has always been the center, resting place, and only source of life for the people of God, the sinner is challenged afresh with the need to deal with this one mediator between God and man, once promised, now proclaimed as having come, having died once, and coming once more, “not to deal with sin but to save,” i.e., finally, doing away with all evil, bringing everlasting glory and paradise to “those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Hebrews 9:28).

By the same token, the sinner is directed to exercise faith in that One who has always been the all-sufficient source of saving righteousness, even for traitors like Adam, schemers like Jacob, prostitutes like Rahab, adulterous murderers like David, and temple-profaning, child-killing idolators like Manasseh. He is directed to one whose righteousness has never, across the running centuries, failed to “make the foulest clean,” or to make miserably weak and ungodly wretches to be more than conquerors, established as pillars in the temple of God.

Finding, foll’wing, keeping, struggling, is he sure to bless?

“Saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs answer – YES!”

B. To the Christian

This warrant for the sinner’s faith is all the more a motive for the Christian’s recovery from spiritual decay and for his perseverance in godliness. Let him study the use

of the sacred history by the author of Hebrews and he will eschew antinomianism and any form of easy-believism. One particularly strong application of the Old Testament in this regard, I believe, is the argument it makes for New Testament believers to examine themselves against an infestation of worldliness creeping into their long ordinary lack-spiritual-luster lives. As a result of an overemphasis, and even exaggeration, of the difference between the Old and New Testaments, many Christians have failed to see how much the Old Testament has to say with regard to the realities, heights and depths of the spiritual experience of pre-Pentecost saints, which are admittedly far beneath what might be expected on this side of the cross. At the same time, they fail to appreciate the strength of faith and the power of hope which carried these saints, with far less of the Word and Spirit, viewing Christ “through the lattice,” of types and ceremonies and shadows, across the centuries until the manifestation of their Desire in the flesh. Does not our modern Christian, enjoying the liberties of the full grown heir, often appear as a spiritual pygmy next to one of these saints under the pedagogy of the Law of Moses?

C. For the Pastor

It is a remarkable, easily observable, feature of much of modern preaching that we do not know what to do with the Old Testament. Again, the reasons are because many of us have been ruined by a Dispensationalism or a Liberalism which leaves us little connection with Old Testament figures (except carefully filtered as role models), and for many others we so don't want to be reading into the text that we fail to see what is really there. We reject the modern higher criticism, but we fail to see the exegetical virtue in those interpreters who were before it, such as the authors of our Confession, who were careful to see the grace and faith which operated in the hearts of those living under the Law, and the

fact that then, as afterward, not all were “Israel” who were “of Israel.” Keeping these things in mind will open rich mines of Old Testament passages for preaching to our modern congregations.

VI. Conclusion

While there are great differences between the Old Testament and the New, they both present in differing form one great subject to which all men of all time are to give their ears and hearts. To Him do all the prophets testify, and God the Father Himself declares: “This is my beloved Son, hear ye Him!”

APPENDIX

The following summary by Charles Hodge struck me as peculiarly helpful in sorting through some of the difficulties raised by various scripture statements concerning the differences between the Old and New Testament. Hodge writes:

Besides this evangelical character which unquestionably belongs to the Mosaic covenant, it is presented in two other aspects in the Word of God. First, it was a national covenant with the Hebrew people. In this view the parties were God and the people of Israel; the promise was national security and prosperity; the condition was the obedience of the people as a nation to the Mosaic law; and the mediator was Moses. In this aspect it

was a legal covenant. It said, "Do this and live." Secondly, it contained, as does also the New Testament, a renewed proclamation of the original covenant of works. It is as true now as in the days of Adam, it always has been and always must be true, that rational creatures who perfectly obey the law of God are blessed in the enjoyment of his favour; and that those who sin are subject to his wrath and curse. Our Lord assured the young man who came to Him for instruction that if he kept the commandments he should live. And Paul says (Rom. ii. 6) that God will render to every man according to his deeds; tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil; but glory, honour, and peace to every man who worketh good. This arises from the relation of intelligent creatures to God. It is in fact nothing but a declaration of the eternal and immutable principles of justice. If a man rejects or neglects the gospel, these are the principles, as Paul teaches in the opening chapters of his Epistle to the Romans, according to which he will be judged. If he will not be under grace, if he will not accede to the method of salvation by grace, he is of necessity under the law.

These different aspects under which the Mosaic economy is presented account for the apparently inconsistent way in which it is spoken of in the New Testament. (1.) When viewed in relation to the people of God before the advent, it is represented as divine and obligatory. (2.) When viewed in relation to the state of the Church after the advent, it is declared to be obsolete. It is represented as the lifeless husk from which the living kernel and germ have been extracted, a body from which the soul has departed. (3.) When viewed according to its true import and design as a preparatory dispensation of the covenant of grace, it is spoken of as teaching the same gospel, the same method of salvation as that which the Apostles themselves preached. (4.) When viewed, in the light

in which it was regarded by those who rejected the gospel, as a mere legal system, it was declared to be a ministration of death and condemnation. (2 Cor. iii. 6–18.) (5.) And when contrasted with the new or Christian economy, as a different mode of revealing the same covenant, it is spoken of as a state of tutelage and bondage, far different from the freedom and filial spirit of the dispensation under which we now live.