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clean heart, and God will and does account us entirely righteous and holy for the sake of Christ, our Mediator. And although sin in the flesh has not yet been altogether removed or become dead, yet He will not punish or remember it. And such faith, renewal, and forgiveness of sins is followed by good works. And what there is still sinful or imperfect also in them, shall not be accounted as sin or defect, even for Christ's sake; but the entire man, both as to his person and his works, is to be called and to be righteous and holy from pure grace and mercy, shed upon us and spread over us in Christ.⁵⁴

Another antidote is to realize the evangelical character of the ministry. That means emphasizing the sense of purpose and the will to serve people. It means drawing upon the impulses of the new man in Christ for the functions of the ministry. It means employing a technique of ministry which recognizes the handicaps and the essential paganism in marshaling people to a conformity to code, and instead endeavors to bring the propulsion of the new life through Jesus Christ to bear on men through Gospel and Sacrament.

St. Louis, Mo.

Conference Paper on Romans 4:5

By H. J. BOUMAN

A very personal reason prompts the selection of my topic. In my senior year at the Seminary, I had not yet really learned what Christianity really is. To be sure, I was not a scoffer. Far from it. I yearned for the honor of being a Christian, *but I did not dare*. The sainted Dr. Bente had succeeded in crushing all my pride in human wisdom. In his lectures on the philosophical systems, ancient, medieval, and modern, he had shown us that human reason the moment it tried to explain transcendental problems disregards its own rules of logic in its deductive and inductive reasonings. And the reason for this phenomenon is not so much its inability to explain matters beyond its sphere, but its bias, its being prejudiced by sin, by its innate enmity against God. Thus all the thinking of natural man regarding sin, death, future life, God, etc., is characterized by utter failure. I had lost all pride of, and confidence in, the power of human wisdom.

⁵⁴ Luther, *Smalcald Articles, Triglott*, p. 499.

The sainted Dr. Graebner, in his lectures on church history, showed us the miracle of the Church in this world. In the midst of hostile surroundings, despite all attempts to suppress it, that wonderful Church not only held its own but also grew and conquered; it marched victoriously across the lands and through the centuries. And its weapon was what to human reason appeared to be utter foolishness—the Gospel of salvation by Christ, who died for us on the Cross. From a human viewpoint it should have failed from the start, but it did not. Thus the story of the Church proved to me that a supernatural power is active in its existence and growth, and that caused to grow in my soul a profound admiration for it, and a great longing to be a member of this marvelous institution. But again I say, I did not dare. Despite all the exegesis and dogmatics and the sermons I heard and the reading I did I was held captive by the idea that I had to make myself worthy of that honor. I thought my Savior would not accept me unless my remorse over sin had reached a certain depth and the control and restraint of my natural desires had achieved a certain degree. Outwardly there was no difference between me and my fellow students, but inwardly I was thoroughly unhappy, unsure, and often on the verge of despair.

Then, one day in November of 1898, the sainted Dr. Stoekhardt explained Rom. 4:5 to us. While I was listening to his words, something happened to me. It was as though a great light illumined my soul; unutterable joy and happiness filled my heart; going to my room, I walked on air. Now I saw what justification really is, now I understood the wonderful meaning of words like these: Jesus came to save sinners, to save that which is lost, etc. The real meaning of *grace* was revealed to me. True, the emotions I had on that day did not last and remain, but, thank God, the knowledge of what justification, grace, and forgiveness of sin mean, did remain. I am therefore glad to speak to you on this theme and to emphasize the immense importance of the doctrine of justification in our preaching and practical work.

I

Τῷ δὲ μὴ ἐργαζομένῳ

In the matter of obtaining righteousness before God there are only two ways thinkable, and these two ways exclude each

other. In verse 4 Paul points out one way and in verse five the other. Only one way can be the true, successful way, not both, neither the two combined. It is either — or. That is of what the adversative particle *δέ* reminds us. What is stated here is in opposition to what is stated in verse 4 (“Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt”). If God calls a man righteous because he worked for it, then it is not grace, but a reward. But the opposite obtains, as is shown in our verse.

“To him that worketh not.” That is one who has abandoned the idea of gaining the favor of God by his own works. An *ἐργαζόμενος* is one who tries to earn something by his own efforts, to become righteous before God. Paul flatly condemns that idea, but human reason opines it to be the only true way, a way to preserve human dignity. Natural man’s thinking is thoroughly *legalistic*. We find this among all men, civilized and uncivilized. Even among people on the lowest plane of civilization the legalistic idea prevails that man must gain the favor of God or the gods or avert their wrath by his own efforts. All pagan philosophers knew of no other way. This idea dominated the thinking of the Pharisees of old.

The same idea prevails among the worldly wise. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, by the famous philosopher Emanuel Kant, I found this statement: “Legality means that an act is done according to a law, but not because of that law. Morality means that an act is done not only according to, but also because of the law.” That seems to be a fine statement. But that Kant does not define therewith *Christian* morality, which means that an act is done not only according to and because of the Law, but also because of gratitude for God’s grace in Christ Jesus, is evident from his statements. His statement about the categorical imperative, which reveals that his morality is nothing more than the morality of a slave, teaches that the Law forces him to work to become righteous before God. This idea pervades also all our literature of fiction. The good wins in the end, and the bad fails. But there is more to say.

This legalism is so thoroughly dominant in human thinking that it has again and again poisoned and subverted the thinking and teaching in the Christian churches. There is

the Roman Church. To be sure, there is still essential Christian teaching. Christ is proclaimed as the Savior of mankind. In one Roman catechism I found an explanation of the Second Article which was beautiful, almost like our own. They speak about the grace of God, faith, etc., but the entire body of their teaching is vitiated by the idea that one must make himself worthy of the grace of God, that Christ will not accept the sinner, will not grant him forgiveness of his sins, unless he *properly* repents and conforms to certain rules established by the Church. Luther, the monk, believed this, and therefore he fasted and prayed and lashed his body to appease Christ and become worthy of receiving forgiveness. Something similar happened to our own Dr. Walther in his university days. That is the reason why serious-minded men and women sought refuge in the life in monasteries. This legalistic idea has crept into Protestant churches too; hence the widespread abandonment of the true Gospel of grace. To many Christ is the Savior *not* because He as our Substitute suffered the penalty for sin, *not* because by His active obedience and passive obedience He prepared the righteousness of God for us, *but* because He showed us the way back to God, because He became for us a Pattern to copy. We must become Christlike, they say, then we shall be God's children again. Some go so far as to maintain that modern man is able to find his way back to God in his own way. And the result is the denial of verbal inspiration of the Bible and the scornful rejection of the substitutionary work of Christ.

In a widely disseminated address, delivered Jan. 31, 1946, John D. Rockefeller wants to unite all churches. He pronounces "ordinance, ritual, creed, all nonessential for admission into the kingdom of God, or His Church. A life, not a creed, would be the test. Not even Baptism or the Lord's Supper are necessary for membership." Why should they be? To him they are mere symbols anyhow. "If you want to observe them, good; if not, good too. You need no creed, individual belief; only be good and fight the evil. The *essence* of true religion is to live a Christlike life. To emphasize the responsibility of the individual to his Maker was Christ's mission on earth." "Means of grace are not necessary; they have nothing to convey." If you boil down all he said, it comes to this: you must work to establish good

spiritual relation between the soul and its God. What this man wants is that Catholics and Jews and Protestants unite in believing in the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. It is pagan religion. "Has Christianity failed?" he asks. My answer is: "Yes, your kind of Christianity has failed and always will." The theme of his lecture was: "The Christian Church—What of Its Future?" My answer is: "The future of your kind of Christian Church is disaster."

The cultured professor of philosophy, the polished gentleman in the modernist pulpit, the betinsled so-called Holy Father in Rome, the whirling dervish, the self-torturing fakir, the flaggelants of the medieval ages, the boomerang-throwing savage in Australia, the sun-worshiping Aztecs, the pipe-smoking Indian, the Mongolian with his prayer mills grinding out his prayers as long as the wind blows, the fur-clad Eskimo, the cannibal of Polynesia, the fanatic worshipers of Allah, Jews, and Gentiles, all, without exception, agree in the principle of work-righteousness. Human reason can rise to no higher plane than to think: I must be an ἐργαζόμενος, I must work for God's favor.

But we must also look into our own heart. Make no mistake, also true Christians are made to feel the impact of this legalism. Why are they at times not fully tasting the joy of salvation? Why are they perturbed in the spirit by fear and uncertainty? Why are they so slow in trusting the Lord's beneficent guiding? Why are they cast down in times of adversity? And this often happens to Christians whom we look upon as pillars of the church. It is the feeling of unworthiness. They would like to feel a remorse like David's or Peter's, but the penitential tears do not come. They would like to curb and control the desires of their flesh, but they often fail in this. They would like to show their gratitude for God's grace in a spectacular manner, but their flesh is too strong. This shortcoming, this failure, causes them to doubt that they are accepted children of God. It is a sore affliction. But what is often behind all of this? The idea that their state of grace depends upon their worthiness. Legalism has corrupted childlike faith in the grace of God. Instead of not working they begin what their carnal reason suggests: they work. But the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write: "*To him that worketh not! Worketh not!! Nor!!!*"

By that he condemns all attempts to gain God's favor by our own efforts as contrary to God's plan and wisdom.

That is a hard lesson to learn, and it cannot be learned in one sitting. It takes our whole lifetime, and then we shall not have mastered it. Let us watch and pray that legalism does not weaken or destroy the joy in our salvation. We must always remember the true purpose of the Law. That purpose is not to make us ἐργαζόμενοι, but to make us see and realize our great sinfulness and total helplessness, so that we become μὴ ἐργαζόμενοι in the matter of justification.

II

Πιστεύοντι δὲ ἐπὶ τὸν δικαιούντα τὸν ἀσεβῆ

Δὲ is again adversative. Instead of trying to gain God's favor by his own efforts, instead of earning forgiveness of sins by working, man must believe. Πιστεύειν ἐπὶ τινα means to believe in someone, to rely on someone, to have confidence in him (the one in whom man must believe). Δικαιούντα τὸν ἀσεβῆ. Let us first look at the word ἀσεβῆς. It is translated "ungodly." An ἀσεβῆς is one who does not honor God, does not worship God as his Lord. When Adam disregarded the command of his Lord, he became an ἀσεβῆς. He no longer feared and loved and trusted in God. His fellowship with God was disrupted. Instead of being *godly*, he now was *ungodly*, and that describes *all men*. Everyone is born ungodly. We must not limit this term to so-called great sinners, *gottlose Leute*. Ungodly is everyone who refuses to obey God in everything. We are by nature ungodly, every one of us. Natural man's thinking, his emotions, his volitions, are out of tune, are not in harmony with God, but separate from and against God. That is a terrible situation. It is a state of rebellion, a state of constant warring against the highest authority in the world. It means a separation from the Fountain of Life, from Him from whom all blessings flow. And that means an existence without peace, a life of ceaseless dread; it means a living death; it means to be under the curse at all times. And many who realize a little of this are driven into utter despair. Life becomes an unbearable burden to them.

That is not the point here, however. The point is that τὸν ἀσεβῆ is generic; it denotes man in general; it means

every human being, including you and me. Now, what happens to a person when he is found to be a lawbreaker? He is punished, of course. We rightly expect that every honest judge will condemn and punish the evildoer. Indeed, it is his solemn duty to do so. God, the righteous Judge, has cursed everyone that sinneth. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness." "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." This is not an idle threat; it agrees with man's thinking. But—and let us listen to it with the greatest attention—here God is said to be δικαιοῦν the ungodly. Δικαιοῦν is a judicial term used in court language. It means to declare just, the very opposite of what the ungodly must expect. God declares the ungodly to be the opposite of what he is. Let us in no wise detract from or weaken the force of this marvelous statement. The situation is this: The ungodly stands before God, his Judge; he expects to hear a sentence of condemnation, but the divine Judge declares him to be just, pronouncing the sinner to be holy, the guilty to be innocent, the foul to be pure, the wicked to be good. He completely ignores the sinfulness, the unrighteousness, and declares the sinner to be righteous, so perfectly righteous that he is fit to be received into heaven. What a remarkable statement this is: "God justifieth the ungodly!" How contrary to all human thinking!

But in the preceding chapters the holy inspired writer has amply explained how this marvelous action was brought about. God sent His own beloved Son into the world. Jesus willingly came, placed Himself under the Law, became our Substitute, was made the *one great Sinner by imputation*, was cursed and condemned in our stead, paid the penalty of the Law for us by suffering and dying on the cross. He even suffered the torment of hell for us. And when all was done, when divine justice was satisfied, He was released again. God resurrected Him from death, thus putting on His work the divine stamp of approval. And because of this saving work of His Son, God has justified the ungodly; He has pronounced every sinner to be guiltless and holy, or, in other words, He has forgiven all sins.

I say "has" although our text has "justifies," the present tense. Let us look at the words again: "But believeth in

Him who justifieth the ungodly." That justifying *does not follow* believing. If it did, it would be a conditional justification, and the meaning would be that if the ungodly believes, then God will justify him. But that is entirely foreign to this sentence. Besides, how can I depend or rely on anything that is not a fact, that has not taken place? No; first God justifies the ungodly, and then the ungodly has something to believe, to depend on. The statement "God justifies the ungodly" is not cumbered by any condition; there are no *if's* or *provided's*, none whatever. God justifies the ungodly regardless of his behavior or belief, even before he was born, and therefore the ungodly is justified whether he believes it or not. Justification is an accomplished fact; it is universal even as salvation is. Therefore Jesus uses the past tense: "For God so *loved* the world." "The Son of Man *came*." Paul uses the past tense: "God *was* in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and *hath* committed unto us the Word of Reconciliation." So when the ungodly believes that God justifies him, he accepts an accomplished fact; he believes with David that with God *there is* forgiveness of sin.

Let us accept the grand syllogism of faith:

Major: God justifieth the ungodly

Minor: I am ungodly

Conclusion: Therefore God justifieth me

III

Λογίζεται ἡ πίστις αὐτοῦ εἰς δικαιοσύνην

"And his faith is being counted for righteousness." Note the definite article. This faith, what faith? The faith that God justifies the ungodly. That is the faith of which the holy writer speaks, and this particular faith is being counted for righteousness. *Λογίζεται* means is counted for, is accounted, is looked upon and taken for. "For righteousness" — that is the righteousness that God demands, the perfect righteousness that opens the door of heaven and guarantees the entry into paradise. He who believes that God justifies the ungodly and thus applies this pronouncement of God to himself is looked upon as having perfect righteousness and is being treated as a righteous person ought to be treated. Such faith brings him into possession of that perfect righteousness.

Therefore the Bible also says: "Faith justifies, makes righteous." The two statements "God justifies" and "faith justifies" denote the same thing, only from different viewpoints. God, on the basis of Christ's saving work pronounces and declares the ungodly righteous, and faith accepts that declaration. Thus he applies it to himself, and now faith has that righteousness for its own. So faith justifies.

It has been said that faith justifies because of its great moral value. True, faith revolutionizes man's life, changing him altogether. Indeed, faith has very great moral value, but it is not for that reason that it is being counted for righteousness. That is the legalistic view of faith. That view contradicts the word "faith" itself. *Faith* stands here in direct opposition to *work*. We are told here that we should *not work, but believe*. So faith cannot be taken here as an act of great moral value. It is nothing else than the hand that grasps the fact, the truth, that God justifies the ungodly and appropriates it. The righteousness of God, earned and prepared by Christ and intended for all, is accepted by the individual by his believing it. So *objective* justification becomes *subjective* justification.

Because of this it does not matter whether faith is strong or weak. Faith, strong or weak, lays hold on Christ, grasps the righteousness of God, and that is what counts. We must not build the certainty of being righteous on the state of our faith. Our being righteous does not depend on our feeling righteous. Thank God for that, because Christians often feel anything but being accepted children of God. Often their soul is filled with fear and thoughts of being rejected. No; faith clings to God's promise, faith clings to the fact that God justifies the ungodly, that HE HAS SAID SO! Faith turns away from all feelings, good or bad, and rivets its attention on what God said.*

Such faith is being counted for righteousness. God looks upon that which faith has taken hold of, and is pleased. As He said to Christ, so also He says to the believer: "You are My beloved child. You are the apple of Mine eye. You are My child, and I am your Father. I will give you anything you ask for if it is for your own good. I will place My

* Ich glaub', was Jesu Wort verspricht,
Ich fuehl' es oder fuehl' es nicht.

omnipotence, My omniscience, My eternity at your service. I will see to it that everything that happens, even sickness, war, death, anything and everything, turns out to your advantage. I will turn all sorrows into blessings. And finally I will deliver you from all evil and translate you into heaven. There I will give you to drink of the eternal waters of gladness."

Oh, what a glorious message this is that our faith in Him who justifies the ungodly is being counted for righteousness! And how honored are we who are commissioned to bring this message to the world of the ungodly, to stand before our congregations, to go into the highways and byways, into the hospitals, the prisons, the asylums, and tell each and every one: "God has declared you just. There is pardon, forgiveness, salvation, also for you. No matter who or what you are, no matter to what depth of vileness you may have sunk, the richness of God's grace is sufficient and powerful enough to help you. Simply come, come as you are, come with all your sins and wretchedness, come to the God who justifies the ungodly.

Let us not forget that it is this truth that brings the life-giving power into our message. It makes our message not only a *saving*, but also a *sanctifying* message. All our instruction toward sanctification, all our exhortation to a holy life, will be in vain without the message that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. Therefore every sermon that does not contain this truth is a waste of time and labor and is not based upon the truth. You cannot make your people willing and grateful servants of God unless you make them see this glorious truth that God justifies the ungodly.

Minneapolis, Minn.

