

4-1-1949

All Christians Believe in Justification by Faith

F. Pieper

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Th. Engelder

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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Recommended Citation

Pieper, F. and Engelder, Th. (1949) "All Christians Believe in Justification by Faith," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 20, Article 22.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol20/iss1/22>

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All Christians Believe in Justification by Faith*

There is a great diversity among the Christians. Some are strong in their faith, while others are weak Christians. Some have an excellent knowledge of the Christian doctrine, others are woefully deficient in this respect (Eph. 4:13, 14; Rom. 14:1 ff.). There are orthodox Christians and heterodox Christians. (See Chap. 1 in "Saving Faith": "Orthodoxy and membership in the Christian Church are not conterminous.") But there is full accord among the Christians on the doctrine of justification. All Christians are at one in believing that God forgives their sins by grace, for Christ's sake, without any merit of their own. For it is this faith which makes the Christian.

A person does not become a Christian by believing in the existence of God—even the heathen know that there is a God, Rom. 1:19; not by believing that God created the world and governs it—the heathen know that, too, in a measure; not by believing that God rewards good deeds and punishes evil deeds—the heathen have retained that knowledge, too, Rom. 1:32; 2:14-15; not by striving to obey the voice of conscience—the heathen do that and yet have no hope, Eph. 2:12; nor by giving assent to the "story of Christ," of the Son of God, who died and rose again—even the devils believe that, Matt. 8:29. No, a person becomes a Christian, a member of the Christian Church, only when in the *terrores conscientiae* he completely despairs of his own morality and through the operation of the Holy Ghost comes to believe the "effectus" of the "story of Christ," namely, that his sins are forgiven him for Christ's sake; in other words, when he by faith applies justification to himself.

In the Old Testament all Prophets taught the article of justification by faith and all children of God believed in it.¹

* We are here submitting some sample pages from the prospective translation of Dr. F. Pieper's *Christliche Dogmatik*.—This chapter, like all the rest of Pieper's classical work, contains a vibrant message to the Church.—TH. ENGELDER.

¹ Acts 10:43: "To Him give all the Prophets witness that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins."

And in the New Testament the Apostles taught the same, and all Christians believe in it to the Last Day.² All who do not have this faith, but seek justification by their works are under the curse, Gal. 3:10, are *extra ecclesiam*, are "either Jews or Turks or Papists or heretics" (Luther, IX:17 ff.). And among the Papists there are true Christians, who, in defiance of the teaching of the Pope, put their trust solely in God's mercy in Christ and not in "infused grace."³ Among the heterodox Protestants there are also many who, while in their writings and theological disputations they vitiate the article of justification by the introduction of works, in their heart and before God believe in justification by faith alone.⁴ This unanimous agreement in the doctrine of justification is the "unity of

See Luther on this passage, XII:491 ff. St. Paul takes the prooftexts for the doctrine of the "righteousness of God without the Law" from the Old Testament, Rom. 3 and 4; Gal. 3:6-29; cf. Luther on the protevangelium, Gen. 3:15, in I:230 ff.—The "exegetical acumen" of those exegetes who find that the "Seed of the woman" in Gen. 3:15 refers not to the individual person of Christ, but to "the descendants of woman in general" fails to observe the rule (which even "scientific" exegesis dare not ignore) that the predicate defines the subject. Now, it is stated that the Seed of the woman "shall bruise thy head," hence that the Seed of the woman will overcome the devil, i. e., remove the guilt of sin, which the devil's seduction brought upon all men (John 12:31 ff.; 16:11). That can be predicated not of the descendants of woman in general, but only of the one Descendant of the woman, of Christ. This applies also to the "Seed of Abraham." Paul was not guilty of "rabbinical" exegesis, as Meyer (on Gal. 3:16) charges. Cf. Philippi's excursus on Rom. 4.

² Paul wrote the words of Rom. 3:28; 5:1 ff. in the name of all Christians. The children of God in the New Testament are all "the children of Abraham" because they are "of faith," Gal. 3:7.

³ Apology: "Therefore, even though Popes, or some theologians, and monks in the Church have taught us to seek remission of sin, grace, and righteousness through our own works, and to invent new forms of worship, which have obscured the office of Christ, and have made out of Christ not a Propitiator and Justifier, but only a Legislator, nevertheless the knowledge of Christ has always remained with some godly persons" (*Trigl.*, 225, 271).

⁴ Luther: "When they are engaged in words and disputations, they are one thing; but another when they come to experience and practice. In the former, they speak differently from what they felt before; in the latter, they feel differently from what they spoke before." (*De Servo Arbitrio*, XVIII:1730.) Chemnitz: "These few passages" (from the writings of the Fathers) "I have adduced to show that our doctrine of justification has the testimony of all the pious who ever lived; they gave this testimony not in declamatory lectures and in idle disputations, but in the serious exercise of repentance and faith, when the conscience must wrestle with its own unworthiness before the judgment of God and in the agony of death." (*Examen*, "De justificatione," p. 144.)

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spirit" in which the Holy Ghost keeps the whole Christian Church. (*Hymnal*, 251: 3.) ⁵

That all Christians of all ages and all lands are one in the article of justification is thus set forth by Luther: "The faith that we obtain the forgiveness of sins solely for Christ's sake by faith has been the faith of the Fathers and prophets and all saints from the beginning of the world and has been the doctrine and preaching of Christ and the apostles, who were commissioned to spread it in all the world, and is to this day, and will be to the end, the unanimous understanding and voice of the whole Christian Church, which has always in one mind and with one accord confessed and fought for this article that alone in the name of the Lord Jesus forgiveness of sins is obtained and received, and in this faith they have been justified before God and saved." (XII: 494 ff.)

Confessing the πίστις χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου clearly and unambiguously over against any perversion thereof, Luther and the Lutheran Church do not represent a faction in the Church, but are the mouthpiece of all Christendom on earth.

F. PIEPER (*Christliche Dogmatik*, II, p. 621 ff.,
Justification by Faith, Chap. 5)

⁵ Apology: "We know that those things which we have said are in harmony with the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures . . . and with the whole Church of Christ, which certainly confesses that Christ is Propitiator and Justifier" (*Trigl.*, 225, 268).

Contributors to this Issue

Prof. Thomas Coates is president of Concordia College, Portland, Oregon.

Dr. Theo. Engelder for many years taught dogmatics at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo. He is now professor emeritus.