

## REFORMATION 500 WEEK 23: HEIDELBERG CATECHISM QA'S 59-61

**Question 59: WHAT DOES IT HELP YOU NOW, THAT YOU BELIEVE ALL THIS** [that is, *the articles of the Apostles creed*]? **That I am righteous in Christ before God, and an heir of eternal life.**

Remember that Question 21 taught us that true *faith* is to *believe* everything God has revealed in His Word is truth (John 17:17), and especially to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Since the articles of the Apostles' Creed are a summary of who Jesus is and what He has done to save His people from their sins, to believe these articles means we have true faith, and are united to the ascended Lord Jesus Christ (we are *in Him*) in order to receive all the benefits of the salvation He obtained for us by His life and death.

The first and primary benefit for the believer is, "I am *righteous in Christ* before God, and an heir of eternal life." Righteousness is perfect obedience to God, and is the requirement for eternal life, for disobedience brings death. God told a sinless Adam and Eve: "obey Me perfectly or die." Jesus Christ obeyed God perfectly and died on the cross to fully pay for our disobedience. Therefore, when we are united to Him by true faith, His perfect righteousness – "the *gift* of righteousness" (Rom. 5:17) – is ours and thus we have eternal life. *How* it becomes ours is explained in Question 60.

**Question 60: HOW ARE YOU RIGHTEOUS BEFORE GOD? Only by true faith in Jesus Christ: that is: although my conscience accuses me, that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God, and have never kept any of them, and am still prone always to all evil; yet God, without any merit of mine, of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ, as if I had never committed nor had any sin, and had myself accomplished all the obedience which Christ has fulfilled for me, if only I accept such benefit with a believing heart.**

The question, "How can a man be *righteous* before God?" (Job 9:2) is the same question as, "How can man be *justified* before God?" (Job 25:4). For "to justify," means "to recognize and declare one *righteous* [Psalm 51:6]" (Ursinus, 330).

God cannot justify or declare us righteous because of any righteousness which we have done. "For [as David confessed to God] in Your sight *no one living is righteous*" (Psalm 143:2); "that is, no one shall be acquitted, or declared just by inherent righteousness" (Ursinus, 327). This is because "his works are unholy before his justification," and "after his justification they are also imperfect [Luke 17:10]" (Ursinus, 328). We need perfect righteousness in order for God to declare us righteous.

The good news is that when we are united to Christ by true faith, God gives us the gift of Christ's perfect righteousness. "Christ fulfilled the law by the holiness of His human nature, and by His obedience, even unto the death of the cross [Phil. 2:8]" (Ursinus, 328). Indeed, the "entire humiliation of Christ, from the moment of His conception to His glorification, including His assumption of humanity, His subjugation to the law, His poverty, reproach, weakness, sufferings, death, ... is all included in the satisfaction which He made for us [Rom. 5:15-19; Gal. 3:10-13]" (Ursinus, 327).

The only way that Christ's perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness can become ours is if God **imputes** it to us. The word *impute* is taken directly from the Bible, and it means to credit someone with doing what someone else did for them [Philemon 1:18]. "God *imputes righteousness* apart from works" (Romans 4:6). To impute righteousness "is to regard one that is unrighteous, as righteous, and to absolve him from guilt, and not to punish him, all of which is done on account of the satisfaction of another imputed to him" (Ursinus, 329). God imputes Christ's righteousness to us. He credits us for doing what Christ did for us, as if we had never committed nor had any sin, and had ourselves accomplished all the obedience which Christ has fulfilled for us!

Therefore, on the basis of Christ's perfect righteousness imputed to us God justifies us, declaring us righteous! God does not treat us as guilty sinners deserving of condemnation. He treats us as if we had no sin! This means God will not punish us for our sins (Rom. 8:31-38). We are forgiven the eternal penalty of sin! God imputed our sins to Jesus. He treated Jesus as a sinner even though He wasn't, and made Him pay for our sins, so that He could treat us as perfectly righteous, even though we're not, and *not* make us pay for our sins (2 Cor. 5:19, 21).

We only have to accept this benefit with a believing heart (and even the faith to do this is a gift). How else do you receive the gift of imputed righteousness? If someone else did something for me, the only thing left for me is to believe and say thank you! If God wants to *give* perfect righteousness as a gift, the only proper response is to reach out the empty hand of faith to receive the gift, and say thank you. "Justifying or saving faith" is "when we firmly believe that the righteousness of Christ is granted and imputed to us, so that we are justified in the sight of God" (Ursinus, 111).

"Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28).

**Question 61: WHY DO YOU SAY THAT YOU ARE RIGHTEOUS BY FAITH ONLY? Not that I am acceptable to God on account of the worthiness of my faith, but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ is my righteousness before God; and I can receive the same and make it my own in no other way than by faith only.**

We are justified *by* faith *not because of* faith. When someone gives you a gift, it is *not because* of your outreached hands, as if you were doing something worthy to receive the gift. Rather, you simply receive the gift *by* your outreached hands. Likewise, when God gives us the gift of righteousness it is *not because* of our faith, as if our faith makes us worthy of being declared righteous. Rather, we simply receive God's gift *by* our faith. Faith is the only way to receive a gift. It "is of *faith* that it might be according to *grace*" (Rom. 4:16).

"We are justified only by believing, and receiving the righteousness of another, and not by our own works, or merit. All works are excluded from justification, yes even faith itself in as far as it is a virtue, or work... It is for this reason, that Paul **always** says, that we are justified *by* faith, and *through* faith, as by an instrument; and **never** on account of faith;" for "if we were justified on account of our faith, then faith would no longer be the acceptance of the righteousness of another, but it would be the merit, and cause of our own righteousness" (Ursinus, 332).

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