

Not Justified by Our Own Works

What do you think about this statement on justification?

And we, too, being called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom, or understanding, or godliness, or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart; but by that faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

This, of course, is a classical presentation of the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone. Positively, the author asserts that God justifies man through faith; and this method applies to all people and in every age. "...faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men."

Negatively, the author excludes anything that is of "ourselves" as the basis for justification. It's not by our wisdom, understanding, godliness or works. Specifically, he says that we are "not justified by...works which we have wrought in holiness of heart." A man is not justified by the works done in a state of grace (in those who have 'holiness of heart') as Roman theology teaches. Christians are not justified because God helps them perform meritorious good works.

In a word, this author asserts that a person is justified through faith and not because of good works. Invariably when this truth is proclaimed, someone would stand up and protest: That means that a sinner can 'believe' and continue to live in sin and do nothing good and still go to heaven, right?

No! Not at all. That reaction is, at best, a misunderstanding of *sola fide*, and often a deliberate calumny intended to blacken our reputation.

The same author anticipates that accusation. He immediately adds, "What shall we do, then, brethren? Shall we become slothful in well-doing, and cease from the practice of love?" To which he answers: "God forbid that any such course should be followed by us! But rather let us hasten with all energy and readiness of mind to perform every good work." And he goes on to set forth God as an example of good works, and pleads with the believers to follow Him in doing good works.

In summary, justification is by faith and not by works. Yet, believers are recognized by their good works. That is the scriptural balance between justification, faith and works.

Incidentally, the author of the above quotations is Clement, a bishop of Rome in the first century. I hope and pray that *Roman* Catholics would learn from him justification by faith alone because after all he is not teaching anything new that was not taught by the apostle Paul before him, or by Martin Luther many centuries later.

We "are not justified by ourselves...or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart; but by that faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen"