

Justification in Baptist History and Scripture

(First Revision)

By Elder David Pyles

Among Baptists adhering to the doctrines of grace, there have been two major views on the doctrine of justification. The primary difference in these views concerns the role of faith. The first position claims that man is justified by faith in Jesus Christ in the sense that faith *certifies* his righteous standing before God. This position denies that faith is in any sense a *cause* or *means* to this righteousness; rather, it says righteousness was fully and finally acquired for all elect at Calvary. I will call this the *evidentiary* position as this describes the asserted role of faith. The other view agrees that faith serves to confirm a righteous standing, but adds that it also serves as an *instrument* or *means* of applying the righteousness of Christ to the sinner. This view contends that God still counts a man as condemned until he is brought to faith. I will call this the *instrumental* view. This view has greater acceptance among reformed Christians, partly because it was endorsed in the famous Westminster Confession of Faith. Notwithstanding, the purpose of this paper is to show that the evidentiary position was common among early Baptists, and that it is in greater accord with the Bible.

Early Baptist Views

Many Baptists would probably be surprised to know the popularity of the evidentiary view in their past. The 1689 London Confession of Faith is commonly assumed to be an near-infallible representation of early Baptist beliefs. This confession is usually interpreted as advocating the instrumental view of justification. Baptists who are a bit more knowledgeable in history will also be aware of John Gill (1697-1771) – an English Baptist commentator. Gill was once held in high esteem by Baptists in both England and America, but was gradually relegated to the closet when Baptists drifted in the direction of Arminianism. Now Gill very clearly taught the evidentiary position. Most assume that he was anomalous in this and that the London Confession is more indicative of what Baptists then believed. I think more careful research will show that Gill was representative of many, both before him and after. This appears to be an important point in which many historical Baptists differed from most Protestants.

The London Confession of 1646 was one of the earliest confessions of English Baptists, and is thought by some to be one of the purest representations of their beliefs. The 28th article of the Confession stated:

Those that have union with Christ, are justified from all their sins by the blood of Christ, which justification is a gracious and full acquittance of a guilty sinner from all sin, by God, through the satisfaction that Christ hath made by His death for all their sins, and this applied (in manifestation of it) through faith.

The words “in manifestation of it” powerfully suggest a variation of the evidentiary view. The same conclusion could be drawn from the Midland Confession of 1655, which stated in its 10th article:

That every man is justified by Christ – Romans; viii.33; I Cor. vi.11; apprehended by faith; and that no man is justified in the sight of God partly by Christ and partly by works. Romans iii.20,28,30; Gal. v.4.

Observe that faith is placed after justification, and the role of faith is to “apprehend” justification. Apprehend means “to seize,” and it frequently means “to seize with the mind” or “to comprehend” or “to perceive,” and this is the probable meaning here. Had they intended to convey the idea of instrumental justification, words like “applied” or “appropriated” would have served much better.

The individual writings of Baptists from those times will confirm these interpretations of their confessions. First consider the detailed explanation of Edward Drapes in 1648:

The Scriptures, say we, are justified by faith, how then say you it is by the blood of Christ, Rom. 5:1?

In answer to this, there are two things to be minded:

1. That when men sinned, there was something threatened (viz.) eternal wrath and misery, which was not then inflicted.
2. Man’s conscience became guilty, and so wrath, fear, terror and torment seized on him. Now we must consider that the blood of Christ frees us from both of these: from the first, while we in our own minds, through wicked works, were enemies; from the second, viz. that guilt we had contracted through sin, the blood of Christ saves us through faith; therefore, it is truly said, being justified by faith we have peace with God. Faith receives what Christ hath done for us, and so justifies us in our consciences, that we have no more conscience of sin, that is to say, guilt for sin, which will appear more plainly by this similitude: A man hath committed an offense against the law, suppose felony or treason. Now the law saith, He that so offendeth shall die the death. The conscience of his fault presently strikes horror to his spirit. The man is apprehended and imprisoned for it and shut up till the dismal day of execution. Now while the poor man can expect nothing but death, some friend of his, unknown to him, sues for his pardon, satisfies the law and obtains it, by which his friend hath made sure of his life. Now is the man truly justified or acquitted from his fault though he knows it not. Well, what then? His friend comes to him and saith, Be of good cheer, thy offense is forgiven thee and so gives him his pardon which he gladly accepts, and, having received it, he is now delivered from his bondage, the prison opened and the jailer commanded to set him at liberty and he is as surely freed from the offense as if he had not sinned at all. Even so it is with a poor soul, for when man sinned, wrath, even eternal misery was threatened and his spirit filled with horror. Now the Lord Christ, when the soul was a stranger to him, obtained his pardon, purchased it with His own blood, and then the man’s eternal happiness was made sure of, and when the Lord Christ tells him what he hath done for him, saying to him, thy sins are pardoned my son, fear not, then the wrath, horror, guilt and terror fly away, and the man is by faith, that is to say, by believing what Christ hath done, at peace in his soul.

Faith, I say, is not the man’s justification or righteousness, but receives it, for it is a free gift of God. – (“Gospel Glory Proclaimed Before the Sons of Men in the Visible and Invisible Worship of God,” Ch 12, 1648)

Another English Baptist named Samuel Richardson wrote a detailed treatise on justification in 1647. Richardson was a signer of the 1646 Confession. He summarized his views on faith with:

That faith or any thing in us is not a *cause, means, or condition*, required to partake of the Covenant of Grace, justification or salvation, but only *fruits and effects* of the Covenant.
– (“Justification by Christ Alone,” 1647)

In that same treatise, William Kiffen, a signer of both the 1646 and 1689 Confessions, endorsed the work with these comments:

That the Scripture holds forth justification by faith in a sense *is very clear*, but yet under no other consideration, *but by way of evidence*, Heb. 11:1,2. As it respects the taking away of sin from off the Conscience: For indeed the debt is paid by the blood of Christ alone, and we are therefore said to be justified by His blood, Rom. 5:9. For indeed, as Christ Jesus our Lord has paid the debt, “*The Lord having laid upon him the iniquities of us all,*” so does He declare this satisfaction and acceptance of us in Christ by faith. Faith is the eye of the understanding whereby the soul comes to see the great things which God the Father has prepared for them who love Him.

Richardson considered the common accusation that “this doctrine opens a gap to licentious liberty.” His reply was as amusing as it was profound: “...none shall stumble and hurt themselves by this truth, but such as shall perish, and it’s no matter for them. The children must have bread though dogs may snatch it.” To this he added, “...the Apostle says, ‘*If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ,*’ (1Jn 2:1). May not men cavil as well at this, and take encouragement to sin?” Ministers should remember that God did not call them to be psychologists but to preach His word. If it is the truth, then the psychological implications will take care of themselves regardless of our speculations about what those implications might be. Hence, no doctrine should be assessed merely on the basis of our speculations about how men will react to it. The doctrines of predestination and preservation have long been impugned by many who presumed to know more about human psychology than God Himself, yet the facts of experience show these doctrines do not have the accused effects, nor do rival doctrines do anything to avert the accused effects.

The same views on justification were advocated by prominent Baptists even after the 1689 Confession. This can be seen in the lengthy treatise entitled “A Defense of the Doctrine of Eternal Justification,” written by John Brine in 1732. And, as stated before, it was clearly the position of Gill (1697-1771), as may be seen in the following quotes from Body of Divinity:

Justification is an act of God’s grace, flowing from his sovereign good will and pleasure; the elect of God are said to be *justified by his grace*; and as if that expression was not strong enough to set forth the freeness of it, the word *freely* is added elsewhere; *Being justified freely by his grace* (Titus 3:7; Rom. 3:24). Justification is by many divines distinguished into active and passive. Active justification is the act of God; it is God that justifies. Passive justification is the act of God, terminating on the conscience of a believer, commonly called a transient act, passing upon an external object. It is not of

this I shall now treat, but of the former; which is an act internal and eternal, taken up in the divine mind from eternity, and is an immanent, abiding one in it; it is, as Dr. Ames expresses it, “a sentence conceived in the divine mind, by the decree of justifying.”

Now, as before observed, as God’s will to elect, is the election of his people, so his will to justify them, is the justification of them; as it is an immanent act in God, it is an act of his grace towards them, is wholly without them, entirely resides in the divine mind, and lies in his estimating, accounting, and constituting them righteous, through the righteousness of his Son; and, as such, did not first commence in time, but from eternity...

Faith is not the cause, but an effect of justification; it is not the cause of it in any sense; it is not the moving cause, that is the free grace of God; *Being justified freely by his grace*, (Rom. 3:24) nor the efficient cause of it; *It is God that justifies*, (Rom. 8:33) nor the meritorious cause, as some express it; or the matter of it, that is the obedience and blood of Christ, (Rom. 5:9,19) or the righteousness of Christ, consisting of his active and passive obedience; nor even the instrumental cause; for, as Mr. Baxter himself argues, “If faith is the instrument of our justification, it is the instrument either of God or man; not of man, for justification is God’s act; he is the sole Justifier, (Rom. 3:26) man doth not justify himself: nor of God, for it is not God that believes”: nor is it a *causa sine qua non*, as the case of elect infants shows; it is not in any class of causes whatever; but it is the effect of justification: all men have not faith, and the reason why some do not believe is, because they are none of Christ’s sheep; they were not chosen in him, nor justified through him; but justly left in their sins, and so to condemnation; the reason why others believe is, because they are ordained to eternal life, have a justifying righteousness provided for them, and are justified by it, and shall never enter into condemnation: the reason why any are justified, is not because they have faith; but the reason why they have faith, is because they are justified; was there no such blessing of grace as justification of life in Christ, for the sons of men, there would be no such thing as faith in Christ bestowed on them; precious faith is obtained through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ, (2 Peter 1:1) nor, indeed, would there be any room for it, nor any use of it, if a justifying righteousness was not previously provided. Agreeable to this are the reasonings and assertions of Twisse, Maccovius, and others. Now if faith is not the cause, but the effect of justification; then as every cause is before its effect, and every effect follows its cause, justification must be before faith, and faith must follow justification.

Faith is the evidence and manifestation of justification, and therefore justification must be before it; *Faith is the evidence of things not seen*, (Heb. 11:1) but it is not the evidence of that which as yet is not; what it is an evidence of, must be, and it must exist before it... – (2.5, p 203-204)

Gill, Brine and others of their times contended for what has been called “eternal justification.” The propriety of such terminology I will consider later. The important point for now is that the various quotes above indicate that justification was a carefully considered subject among the early Baptists and that the evidentiary position was a common view. This stands in contrast to articles two and four in the chapter on justification in the 1689 Confession. These articles clearly conveyed the idea of instrumental justification:

11.2 Faith thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet it is not alone in the person justified, but ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.

11.4 God did from all eternity decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did in the fullness of time die for their sins, and rise again for their justification; nevertheless, they are not justified personally, until the Holy Spirit doth in time due actually apply Christ unto them.

The explanation for this difference from the 1646 Confession and the writers just quoted is possibly to be found in the origin of the 1689 Confession. This document is actually a modified form of the Westminster Confession. The Westminster was drawn by an assembly summoned by British Parliament. Several denominations were represented in the assembly, but the great majority were Presbyterians. None were Baptists. The document has ever since been considered a Presbyterian confession. In those days the Church of England asserted its political powers against other denominations in that country. The Presbyterians were a formidable body also, and had sufficient power to offer resistance to this persecution. Baptists and Congregationalists are alleged to have sought refuge by presenting an appearance of alignment with the Presbyterians, which they did by adopting as their own confessions modified versions of the Westminster.

These circumstances have caused the 1689 Confession to be viewed with skepticism by some Baptists, who question whether it is completely representative of early Baptist beliefs. Some have even contemptuously called it a “dipped” paedobaptist confession, with “dipped” referring to the fact that a substitution of immersion for sprinkling was one of the primary modifications that Baptists made to the original document. These same skeptics place more confidence in the 1646 Confession, which they say is a purely Baptist document and void of Protestant influence. This skepticism concerning the later confession is oftentimes carried to unreasonable extremes. It is on balance an outstanding document and worthy of respect. But there is reasonable evidence that the earlier confession intended a different view on justification, or one could at least say it intended a different emphasis. It is also to be considered that Baptists were a rapidly growing body at this time with large numbers coming from other orders, so that, on a point of doctrinal detail, what was a majority view in 1646 may not have been in 1689.

The following quote from Charles Spurgeon (1834-92), the most famous of the English Baptists, shows a strong tendency toward the eternal view of justification held by Gill, but expresses qualifications that would also honor the wording of the 1689 Confession:

So with regard to justification, I must hold, that in the moment when Jesus Christ paid my debts, my debts were cancelled – in the hour when he worked out for me a perfect righteousness it was imputed to me, and therefore I may as a believer say I was complete in Christ before I was born, accepted in Jesus, even as Levi was blessed in the loins of Abraham by Melchisedec; but I know likewise that justification is described in the Scriptures as passing upon me at the time I believe. “Being justified by faith,” I am told “I have peace with God, through Jesus Christ.” I think, therefore that adoption and justification, while they have a very great alliance with eternity, and were virtually done then, yet have both of them such a near relation to us in time, and such a bearing upon our

own personal standing and character that they have also a part and parcel of themselves actually carried out and performed in time in the heart of every believer. I may be wrong in this exposition; it requires much more time to study this subject than I have been able yet to give to it, seeing that my years are not yet many; I shall no doubt by degrees come to the knowledge more fully of such high and mysterious points of gospel doctrine. But nevertheless, while I find the majority of sound divines holding that the works of justification and adoption are due in our lives I see, on the other hand, in Scripture much to lead me to believe that both of them were done in eternity; and I think the fairest view of the case is, that while they were virtually done in eternity, yet both adoption and justification are actually passed upon us, in our proper persons, consciences, and experiences, in time – so that both the Westminster confession and the idea of Dr. Gill can be proved to be Scriptural, and we may hold them both without any prejudice the one to the other. – Spurgeon's Sermons, "Adoption", Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Vol. 7

Likely both sides of the argument will find support for themselves in this quote, but it definitely shows that Spurgeon had far greater respect for the position of Gill than those modern Baptists who contemptuously denounce him with such terms as “hypercalvinist” and “antinomian.” Indeed, Spurgeon’s respect for the instrumental position he attributed to the number of divines who held it, but his respect for Gill’s position he attributed to the teachings of *scripture*. Now the real issue for our present purpose is whether faith is instrumental in making one righteous before God. With respect to this, Spurgeon said, “So with regard to justification, I must hold, that in the moment when Jesus Christ paid my debts, my debts were cancelled – in the hour when he worked out for me a perfect righteousness it was imputed to me, and therefore I may as a believer say I was complete in Christ before I was born...” This statement clearly makes the crucifixion alone to be the point in logic where the elect were made righteous before God. When Spurgeon says, “I was complete in Christ before I was born,” he obviously meant in a legal sense, which is exactly what the evidentiary position contends. Later when Spurgeon qualified by saying that justification was “actually passed upon us” in time, the only way to reconcile this with his earlier statement is to understand that by “justification” he meant *declared* and *certified* as righteous, which is exactly how the evidentiary position interprets the word. So when all parts of this statement are carefully weighed, it says much to endorse the evidentiary view.

This view can be found among early American Baptists as well. This can be seen in a Circular Letter of the Philadelphia Association entitled “Justification,” published in 1785, authored by William Rogers:

Our justification is by some ascribed to faith as an instrumental cause. Strictly speaking, we apprehend faith as no cause at all in this momentous procedure, but rather an effect. It is true, the scriptures frequently mention a justification by faith. By such expressions it is evident the object, and not the act, of faith is designed; the object of faith is Christ and his righteousness; this the believing soul lays fast hold on. Faith is the eye which discovers, the hand which receives... It is beautifully noticed by one of our very first and most orthodox writers. “The reason why any are justified is not because they have faith; but the reason why they have faith is because they are justified.”

The American Primitive Baptists have almost unanimously carried this view forward to the present. The following list of references is from their respected historical figures:

- 1) Wilson Thompson, Triumphs of Truth, 1825.
- 2) Samuel Trott, "My Thoughts on Justification," Signs of the Times, vol 5. 1837.
- 3) Gilbert Beebe, "Ephesians 2:8," Signs of the Times, Oct 15, 1867.
- 4) James Oliphant, Justification and Kindred Subjects, 1899.
- 5) Sylvester Hassell, "Articles of Faith," The Gospel Messenger, Jan 1901.

One point where these Baptists might appear to differ is that some claimed justification to have occurred in eternity whereas others claimed it occurred at the crucifixion or resurrection of Christ. Some of the English Baptists were disposed to claim the former. Primitive Baptists have been more apt to claim the latter. In the 1837 article by Samuel Trott listed above, he wrote in defense of the idea that justification occurred at the resurrection. The following statement from this article is particularly interesting:

...I thus choose to make myself singular in departing from the beaten trail of our Old School brethren on this point. And I freely admit that my brethren have on their side all the true advocates for the doctrine of Sovereign grace who have published anything on this subject, perhaps for the last hundred years; that is, so far as I have been acquainted with their writings. – (Signs., "My Thoughts on Justification," vol 5, 1837)

The real importance of this quote is that it suggests the popularity of the evidentiary view among early Baptists. Trott, who was well-acquainted with Baptist literature, claimed that virtually everything published by "Old School" Baptists on this subject for 100 years was in essential agreement with the position that had been defended by Gill, Brine, etc. Trott wrote nothing to correct their views as to the role of faith. He only complained of their assertion that justification occurred in eternity.

The differences between these Baptists were much smaller than initially appear, and derived largely from imprecise terminology. All agreed that the death of Christ was the point in logic where the elect were rendered righteous before God. All agreed that, chronologically, Old Testament saints were accounted righteous before the crucifixion occurred, and that this was done upon the predetermination of God to bring the latter event to pass. When the English Baptists asserted that justification occurred in eternity, they were right in their thinking but potentially misleading in their terminology. Their thinking was that justification is ultimately based in the state of God's mind toward the elect, and that because He is an immutable God, His view of the elect must have always been the same – not at all points of our logic but at all points of time.

This thinking is irrefutable, though some have presumed to overthrow it, saying, for example, that since God's plan to create does not imply creation, neither does His plan to justify imply justification. While this complaint has a valid point, it is not a point that would refute what the English Baptists intended. A distinction must be made between an action of God and the state of His mind. God might *plan* an action or change of action, such as the introduction of a Universe or the regeneration of a man, but it is logically impossible to *plan* a change of mind. There is no sense in saying that God planned to

view the elect as unrighteous over some span of time, but simultaneously planned to change His mind and view them differently thereafter. He indeed viewed His elect as righteous in Christ from eternity, and with no other position will one make sense of the fact that God was glorifying His deceased elect long before Christ died and before there was a gospel to preach.

When a change of mind is based on an action, the change does not occur with execution of the action but at the point the action became *planned*. Consider a man whose mind is perplexed with a problematic state he must correct the following day. As he contemplates the problem the night before, he suddenly sees an action leading to a sure solution. At this point, a distinction must be made between the circumstance that produced the problem and the problem itself. The circumstance will be resolved by execution of the plan on the following day, but the problem itself, as a state of his mind, is instantly resolved and settled simply by the fact that now there is a plan. If by “justification” we are referring to the state of God’s mind toward the elect, then all problems were settled in eternity with the completion of His plan, even though the actual execution of the plan would occur in time. If the sacrifice of Christ is truly the sole basis of our righteous state, then the mind of God toward the elect became settled at the point in logic where this sacrifice was planned. To say otherwise is either to affirm that God was not truly resolved within Himself that the sacrifice would be sufficient, or to affirm that God was unsure of His ability to bring this sufficient condition to pass.

However, the complaint against the eternal justification position has merit inasmuch as God’s *justification* of the elect and His *view* of them are not exactly the same thing. Strictly speaking, justification is an official *declaration of righteousness*. It is an *expression* of Divine opinion, not the Divine opinion itself. When discussing this subject, it is important that such delineations be made. In particular, distinctions must be made between: 1) *viewing* someone as righteous, 2) *declaring* them as righteous, 3) *setting the basis* for their righteousness, and 4) *applying* righteousness to them. All these Baptists agreed there is no *application* of righteousness in faith, so they disclaimed the instrumental view. They also agreed that the *basis* for righteousness is in the sacrifice of Christ alone. Differences between them were largely based in the distinction between “viewing” one as righteous versus “declaring” them as such. They also had the common habit of sometimes using “justification” in the sense of *making* righteous. Such is no great error as this is also a secondary definition of the word in the Bible, but it will lead to confusion without being accompanied with adequate clarification.

To illustrate these ideas, consider an audience in a courtroom along with an accused man. These anxiously await as the judge ponders the presented evidence of the case in his chambers. Upon contemplating this evidence, the judge concludes that it is impossible for the man to be guilty of the accusation against him. Suppose the judge, upon arriving at this conclusion, were to consider his work done, and were to indifferently depart for home through the backdoor of the courthouse, spending the balance of the day fishing. The courtroom and the accused man would be left in suspense. The man has not been *justified* in the sense of being *declared* righteous. The good judge will not be so negligent. As he enters the courtroom with verdict in hand, he glances at the accused

man and *views* him as innocent. But the anxiety of the accused man is such that he is now trembling, and the courtroom is anxious with him. The man has not been formally acquitted, and to everyone except the judge, the moment of truth still awaits.

In like manner, the Old Testament saints were *viewed* as righteous by the Supreme Judge because their verdict was in His hand. It was upon this basis that their names were written “*in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,*” (Rev 13:8). But the formal declaration of their acquittal had not yet been made. Their Defense Counsel, the Son of God, had assured them through His word that righteousness would be given them, and that it would be sufficient for their acquittal, but still, the verdict had not been declared. Then when Jesus Christ had been crucified for their offenses, and His body was in the grave, all the facts relevant to the case had been established, or we could say the *basis* for their acquittal had been fully set, but still, the verdict had not been *declared*. As with the anxious courtroom described above, men, angels and even devils still awaited the Moment of Truth in which the Supreme Judge of the Universe would *declare* the momentous Verdict, yet that Verdict had been in His hand from eternity. The Verdict was most powerfully *declared* when He quickened the body of the Lord Jesus Christ and raised Him from the dead. The resurrection was the verdict. It was not part of the facts that had been considered when arriving at this verdict. It was the verdict itself. Jesus was “*delivered for our offences,*” and with this event, all facts of the case were set in place. He was then “*raised for our justification*” (Rom 4:25) in the sense that this event *declared* our acquittal. Yet this was a declaration pertaining to the elect family of God *en masse*. It was also needful that there be declarations at the individual or personal level, which of course brings us to the issue of justification by faith.

A Scriptural Defense of the Evidentiary View

Before presenting our defense, there are a couple of points of agreement between these views that are needful for an understanding of this doctrine:

First, when an individual is rendered righteous before God through the blood of Christ, this is not a change *to* or *in* the individual but is a change *for* the individual. It is something done in his behalf. Consequently, justification is not to be confused with regeneration. While advocates of the instrumental view may have regeneration and justification occurring at the same point in time, even they acknowledge that the concepts are very different. To illustrate the difference, consider a hardened criminal who has been convicted and is now in prison awaiting execution. Suppose this man represents a formidable threat to society. Before he could be justly and conscionably set free, two things must be done: First, the demands of the law against him must be removed. Second, his hardened nature must be changed such that he no longer poses a threat to his fellow man. In the first of these steps, the man is rendered righteous before the eyes of the law much like the elect are rendered righteous before God through the blood of Christ. The second step, or the changing of his nature, is analogous to regeneration. A failure to recognize the distinction between these two steps has contributed toward the common but erroneous idea that men are born again by the act of believing. While the

scriptures repeatedly state that men are justified by faith, never do they teach that men are regenerated by faith. Faith is the consequence, not the cause, of being born again.

Second, both views understand that Old Testament saints were accounted righteous by God notwithstanding the fact they lived prior to the crucifixion. There is nothing mysterious in this. The same type thing is common in society. Two men may be equally indebted to the bank yet be viewed in an entirely different light. Suppose satisfaction for the debts of the first man are foreseeable. He will be viewed by the bank and the community as an honest and trustworthy man. But suppose no satisfaction is foreseeable for the debts of the second. Because default appears certain for him, all will view him either as dishonest or unworthy of credit. The Lord accounted Old Testament saints as righteous because satisfaction for their debts was certainly in view.

These two views also concur on many other important things, including all points of the doctrines of grace. However, their difference on the point of justification is sufficient to warrant our careful investigation of scripture. My belief is that such investigation will show the evidentiary position to be superior, and for the following reasons:

1) The instrumental position is uncomfortably vague, and tends to morph into the evidentiary position when forced to explicate itself. When the instrumental position says that an elect is accounted condemned until brought to faith, the practical implications of being in such a state are very unclear. The man was elected and predestined to salvation from eternity; Christ died for his sins on the cross, and he is also supposedly predestined to be accounted righteous at some future point in time, but is for the present accounted by God as condemned. How does this effect God's posture toward him? Does this mean that if the man were to die in this state he would be eternally damned? The advocates of this position resolutely affirm that he could not die at this point since this would be in violation of Divine predestination. This explanation is therefore based on strictly hypothetical notions, and as such, could be credibly charged as meddling with foolish and unlearned questions. So does it mean that God, for the time being, must altogether treat him as a non-elect, turning a blind eye to the fact that he will one day be a regenerate man? If this be the claim then it is surely wrong. Paul had no faith until Damascus road, yet he had been separated by God from his mother's womb for the purpose of preaching the gospel. There is no doubt also that Divine providence was over his unregenerate life giving him education and experience to prepare him for his ultimate purpose. It is important to understand that at no point in our experience does God change toward us; rather, God changes us toward Him. So, still seeking for an answer, does it mean that God will deny him faith? The instrumental position cannot offer this answer as it would produce a stalemate. Will he be denied the Holy Spirit? This answer also produces a stalemate inasmuch as it denies the prerequisite to faith. A man does not believe in order to be occupied by the Holy Spirit; rather, he is occupied by the Holy Spirit in order to believe. So what is the practical consequence of him being accounted condemned until the point of faith? It appears that no reasonable answer can be given to this question except to say that he will be denied the visible certification of the righteousness Christ has bought for him. Now the problem is that when the instrumental view offers this answer it will have effectively morphed into the evidentiary position.

The position is also vague in its very use of the term “instrument.” Instruments are of course preceded by some necessity that the instrument is thereafter designed to accommodate. When a man builds a house, he will first perceive a need to drive nails, which will motivate him to invent or acquire an instrument, the hammer. He will also see a need to lay mortar, which will move him to invent or acquire a trowel. In both cases, the necessity demanding the instrument is seen first, and is at least as obvious as the instrument itself. Now if faith is an instrument in the building of a righteous man, we should have been carried to this conclusion by some obvious necessity that faith could serve to meet. This was not the case. Rather, it seems that faith was simply seen as playing some highly significant role, but because it was unacceptable to call it a “cause” or “basis,” it got classified as an instrument by default. It is neither a cause nor a basis nor an instrument. It is a certificate.

2) The primary meaning of the term "justify" is to *declare* righteous, not to *make* righteous. Thus, in the primary sense, the act of justifying does not change the thing being justified, but declares it to be what it already is. This can be seen in numerous scriptural examples, including:

He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD. – Prov 17:15

This text presents “justifieth” and “condemneth” asonyms. To condemn a man is not to make him guilty but to *declare* him such. The word “justify” must have a similar meaning or else the symmetry of the text is destroyed. A second example is in:

The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children. – Mt 11:19

Wisdom is not made any wiser by the fact that people acknowledge it to be such, but reasonable people *declare* it to be what it truly is. As another example:

And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. – Lk 7:29

Obviously, people can only acknowledge and declare the wisdom and righteousness of God. They surely cannot aid it or hinder it. As a fourth example:

For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. – Rom 2:13-14

A man that has done the law is already righteous and is in no need of being made such. His state can only be declared. Add a fifth example with:

For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged. – Rom 3:3-4

Men can neither help nor hinder the truth of God’s word, but God can be “justified” by them in the proper sense of the term. Now our sixth example should make the point as powerfully as any:

Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. – Rom 4:23-25

Every Christian understands that it was the death of Christ that put away our sins and *made* us righteous, but this text says it was His resurrection that *justified*. The meaning is that His death established the fact, and His resurrection then *declared* it. This is the case of justification at the corporate level, embracing the entire elect family of God *en masse*. Justification by faith occurs at a personal level, but at either level, the term “justify” conveys the same idea, i.e. to *declare* a righteous state. Other scriptures illustrating this meaning are: Mt 12:35-37, Lk 7:35, 1Cor 4:4, 1Tim 3:16, and Jas 2:21-25.

The fourth, fifth and sixth examples are especially important because they come from the writings of Paul, which are of course the very epicenter of this momentous subject. These examples also present some of his earliest usages of the term. So, following the rule that nothing defines scriptural terms better than scriptures themselves, one should depart from this implied definition only when hard-pressed to do so. To the contrary, one will be very hard-pressed to leave it.

3) When the instrumental position stresses terms like “instrument” or “means” to describe the role of faith, the intent is to avert the idea that faith is somehow supplemental to the obedience and death of Christ as the basis of our righteousness. All parties agree this error would be egregious. But given that the point is crucial, why does the Bible never qualify itself with these terms when speaking of the role of faith? The Bible never says we are justified *by means of* faith. It simply says we are justified by faith. The point is that the instrumental position offers an explanation *of* scripture that is actually nowhere found *in* scripture, even though we have compelling reasons to expect it there. Now any reasonable mind should suspect that qualifications were omitted because no purpose would be served by them under the intended definition of “justify.” Accordingly, these qualifications are also needless under the evidentiary position, because in choosing the primary definition of the term, it has averted the errant ideas to which the instrumental position is vulnerable. The evidentiary position is like the Bible in that it can say without qualification that a man is justified by faith outright, but in the sense in which an accused man is justified by the evidence favoring his case. This evidence does not contribute to the innocence it declares; rather, it is a consequence of that innocence. Accordingly, the

evidentiary position claims that faith does not contribute toward a righteous state before God, but is a consequence of it.

4) The evidentiary position is logically superior in that it places the expected ordering on legal acts of God done *for* the elect with efficient acts of God done *to* the elect. The instrumental position reverses this ordering from what should be expected. Almost any transaction requiring legal action has such work being done before the transaction is executed. When a child is adopted, the legal work is done first then the child is transferred to the new parents. When two companies merge, the legal work is done before the merger is performed. When a house is purchased, legal conditions are met before the house is occupied. When Boaz took Ruth to be his wife, the necessary legal requirements were first met. When Abraham purchased the cave at Machpelah for the burial of Sarah, he first made legal arrangements with the sons of Heth. Numerous other examples could be given. But according to the instrumental view, God spiritually quickens dead alien sinners, liberates them from sin, and places His Holy Spirit within them before the legal work has been done.

All acknowledge that God must consider a man righteous in Christ before resurrecting and glorifying his body. But if a righteous state before God is necessary for this, one should expect it to be necessary for regeneration as well. Regeneration does to the inward man what resurrection does to the outward man. If the legal provisions in the blood of Christ are necessary for one, they should also be necessary for the other. A man is not glorified to absolve his sins; rather, his sins must be absolved if he is to be glorified. The same order should be expected in regeneration. But if sin is put away prior to regeneration, faith cannot be a means of putting it away, or at least not when faith is correctly considered to be the effect, and not the cause, of being born again.

Add to this the fact that regeneration is a liberating act. It liberates from the bondage of carnality and sin (Jn 3:3-5, Rom 8:2, 8:15, 1Cor 1:12, 2Cor 3:17, Col 1:12-13, 2Pet 2:19); but, criminals are not liberated to satisfy the demands of the law. Rather they are liberated because the demands of the law have been satisfied. Hence, a righteous state before God should logically precede regeneration, and should logically precede faith.

When the scriptures speak of the effects of regeneration, they do not include the idea of being made righteous before God. Men are born again to believe (Jn 1:11-13), to know the things freely given them (1Cor 2:12), to see the kingdom of God (Jn 3:3-5), to see the light of the glory of the knowledge of God (2Cor 4:6), to live (Jn 5:24), to never perish (Jn 10:28), to deliver them from their wicked natures (Eph 2:1-3), to deliver from death in sin (Col 2:13), to be translated into His kingdom (Col 1:13), etc, but they are not regenerated to be rendered righteous before God. Rather, these texts are either consistent with the idea that man is rendered righteous prior to quickening, or else the texts go beyond this by actually implying such. For example:

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the

handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross. – Col 2:13-14

Hence, forgiveness of sins was a completed act as of the time of quickening, and the condemnation of the law was already done away as well, having been removed by the death of Christ on the cross. The same pattern is seen in:

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. – Ezek 36:25-27

So this text has cleansing occurring prior to regeneration, as would be expected under the evidentiary position. The same order is seen in 1Cor 6:11. While the scriptures elsewhere speak of the “*washing of regeneration*” (Tit 3:5), as though regeneration itself is a means of cleansing, this should be understood of the cleansing of the nature or of the *manifestation* of being washed in the blood of Christ. Whatever the case, if there is any sense in which God’s children are cleansed prior to regeneration, logic precludes all possibilities except that of *legal* cleansing in the sight of God.

5) The evidentiary position receives abundant support from scripture in its claim that all the elect of God were forever made righteous the moment Jesus died. His death alone met every legal condition to remove their sins and to open the way for their transformation to the image of God. This includes their regeneration and the faith it enables, by which faith they are personally declared righteous or “justified.”

The scriptures consistently present the reconciliation of God toward His people as being a completed action as of the death of Christ. Since it is impossible to conceive of God being reconciled to those who are yet counted as sinners, it follows that if reconciliation were secured by the death of Christ alone, then a righteous state before God must have been secured by the same. Consider:

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. – Rom 5:10

Therefore, we were not merely rendered *reconcilable* to God by the death of Christ, but were actually *reconciled* by it, and this was done when we were contemplated as *enemies*, which could not be said of a believer. Further:

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors

for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. – 2Cor 5:18-20

This text states that God became reconciled to His people by the death of Christ alone, and that having become reconciled, He committed men with the word of the gospel for the purpose of securing reconciliation – not in His own mind towards men, but – in the minds of men toward Him. The mind, purpose and posture of God toward the elect was forever settled in Jesus Christ. The only remaining business is to correct and settle the minds of men.

The same pattern can be observed in:

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. – Eph 2:14-17

Hence, it follows once again that the preaching of the gospel supposes a completed reconciliation and is not the means of securing it. This is restated in:

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross. – Col 2:13-15

The sinner is quickened and brought to faith because he is *already* forgiven, not that he might be forgiven. His sins were long ago nailed to the cross of Calvary. Add to this:

By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. – Heb 10:10

For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. – Heb 10:14

His death on the cross set them apart by perfecting them. This means that all legal claims against them were satisfied. At Calvary, all the legal business of salvation was done for the entire elect family together and at once.

The instrumental position will commonly reply to the scriptures offered above with an argument based on Rom 8:30 where all the elect of God are described in present tense as being “glorified.” The meaning there is that their glorification, while not yet realized, has been rendered absolutely certain. The argument says the above texts should be construed the same. That is, the forgiveness, reconciliation, etc. of which they speak did not actually occur at the cross but were only rendered certain by the cross. This argument fails to consider that the glorification of man is a change produced by an *act* of God

whereas forgiveness, reconciliation, etc. are changes in the *mind* of God. The first type of change may be chronological. The second can only be logical. The future glorification of man may be planned and rendered certain. A future change in the mind of God is impossible. So we need not doubt that these texts indeed teach that the cross was the point in logic where the sins of the elect were put away in the mind of God.

6) The scriptures teach that faith is itself a benefit of being in Christ, but it cannot be both this and the means of applying Christ to the individual. It cannot be both a unique benefit of being in Christ and a means of placing one in Christ. It is *in Christ* that God “*hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places,*” (Eph 1:3). These blessings surely include faith. These blessings were not given to put us in Christ, but because we *already* were in Christ. It is *by Christ* that we “*believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory,*” (1Pet 1:21). It is given us “*in behalf of Jesus Christ*” to believe on His name and to suffer for His sake (Phil 1:29). These things were not given to place us in Christ or apply Christ to us personally, but because we were *already* accounted in Him. When Paul claimed our salvation and faith are not of ourselves but are the gift of God (Eph 2:8-10), the apostle then explained that we are His workmanship created *in Christ Jesus*. Again, faith does not place us in Christ; rather, it is a consequence and benefit of being in Christ. Peter confirmed this by saying, “*Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ,*” (2Pet 1:1). Hence, faith is a benefit of the righteousness of Christ, not a means to attaining it. The instrumental position places Christ in one hand and the Divine purpose to grant faith in the other. It claims the hands are joined at regeneration when faith is given. However, the scriptures teach that these things belong in the same hand.

7) The instrumental view of justification fits awkwardly with the doctrine of immediate regeneration. Immediate regeneration places the new birth prior to faith, claiming the former to be the cause of the latter. So if a righteous state before God is attained by means of faith, then this state must follow regeneration. As explained before, this is the opposite of what one should expect. Legal clearance should be a necessary condition for regeneration, not an effect of it. The various mediate regeneration theories can avoid this problem because they place faith prior to regeneration, and could therefore place justification prior to regeneration also. It is perhaps for this reason that mediate regeneration and instrumental justification are oftentimes accompanying doctrines. However, the compatibility of these doctrines with each other does little to rectify the incompatibility of mediate regeneration with the scriptures. All the scriptural evidence favoring immediate regeneration simultaneous weighs against instrumental justification.

8) Elect infants dying in infancy cannot be justified by an act of evangelical faith, yet they must surely be accounted righteous through Christ. This leaves the instrumental position with no recourse but to either declare these cases exceptional or to say it is the *habit* of faith – not evangelical faith – that serves as the actual means of rendering one righteous. Here “habit” is used with a secondary definition wherein it conveys the idea of being *inhabited* by a prevailing disposition to Christ and spiritual things. It is also a near-equivalent to “vital union.” Now the relevance of this concept is not to be denied, and

any Primitive Baptist will affirm it to be common to all born-again people. They will also insist that it is prerequisite to evangelical faith. However, the problem with this explanation is that it makes distinctions that are nowhere acknowledged by scripture in its teachings on justification. The instrumental position has once again offered an explanation *of* scripture that is not an explanation *in* scripture. Instead, when the scriptures speak of justifying faith, they repeatedly include the idea of evangelical faith.

9) As eternal salvation is unconditional in its final outcome, all necessary means thereto must be unconditional as well. A righteous state before God is surely a necessary condition for eternal salvation, so if faith is a means to attaining this state, then it follows that such faith is unconditionally given. An unconditional outcome cannot be attained by conditional means. None will deny that God indeed gives faith in varying measures to all of His children; however, it is apparent that faith is also something to which they are exhorted, and for which they strive, and in which they are partially active, and in which they sometimes succeed and sometimes fail. So there are respects in which the child of God is both passive and active in faith, and in the final outcome, the strength of his faith, while being founded on an unconditional gift of grace, is partly conditional upon his use and development of this gift.

If “justification by faith” goes beyond a declaration and refers to the actual attainment of a righteous state before God, then the faith whereby this state is secured must be unconditionally given and man must be passive in it. Now the claim that only passive faith contributes toward justification would be credible if scriptures had ever made such a distinction. In fact they do not. Further, they sometimes present justification by faith as deriving in some meaningful way from our *active* efforts to believe on the Lord Jesus.

In proof of the last claim, consider the key passage in Habakkuk where the Lord said, “Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith,” (Hab 2:4). Paul made this text a cornerstone of his doctrine of justification by faith and quoted it not less than three times (Rom 1:17, Gal 3:11, Heb 10:28). However, the text in Habakkuk is stated as a rebuke of the prophet for his lack of trust and patience in the Lord. It was intended to elicit an active obedience from the prophet.

Paul also connected justification by faith with the active obedience of believing in:

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. – Gal 2:16-17

Hence justification by faith can be a matter that men may actively pursue. This active pursuit can be further seen in:

Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. – Phil 3:8-9

So Paul desired a righteousness that was not his own, yet there was some sense in which he strove to attain it. This righteousness and the justification accompanying it are obviously connected with *active* obedience in the walk of faith.

We would not expect the scriptures to command men to perform conditions to achieve a salvation that is everywhere else described as an unconditional gift of grace. But it is reasonable to suppose that by means of a faithful walk toward God, men could *know* their interest in this salvation and experience its joy. And this is precisely the position taken by the Baptists of old on this important subject of justification by faith. Faith, they said, is not a contributing factor toward the attainment of a righteous state before God. Only the blood of Christ does this. But faith in Jesus Christ is the divinely ordained certificate of a righteous state before God, and it is the means by which God declares to us our personal interest in Jesus Christ and our righteousness in Him alone. Through our active exercise of this gift of faith, our righteous standing before God through Jesus Christ is declared all the more convincingly; our assurance is strengthened and our joy made full.

Every true Christian is engaged daily in the struggle to walk with faith and to do so with greater conviction. This is oftentimes an arduous battle because the oppositions of Satan are numerous and formidable. Every true Christian will readily profess that his ability to believe is an unmerited gift of the grace of God. Yet he knows within himself that his doubts, fears and other failings of faith are owing to his own weakness and corruption. This shows he is *actively* engaged in the battle. He is not altogether passive in his faith. Now if the instrumental view of justification by faith were true, so that faith were the divinely-applied instrument whereby men are made righteous in the eyes of God, then one would expect the scriptures to distinguish between these passive and active components of faith, and to attribute the righteous state to the passive component alone. The scriptures do not delineate between these components when speaking on this subject. Instead they have the justification that is by faith deriving from both. This fact militates hard against the instrumental view and weighs heavily in favor of the evidentiary view.

10) While the scriptures affirm that great things can be accomplished by believing or by having faith, it is readily understood in these cases that the belief itself does not affect the event, but it is the *obedience* of believing that is effectual. Apart from this consideration, it is always the case that belief of a truth derives from that truth and cannot contribute toward making it true. It is contrary to reason to suppose that believing something to be true when it is not true can make it true. The instrumental position commits this error. It has a condemned man being absolved by means of his believing that he is absolved. If the man is truly condemned as is affirmed, then his belief is merely a denial of this truth, and should therefore only exacerbate his condemnation. The evidentiary position is far

more logical. It affirms that a man believes he is absolved in Christ because this is in fact the case, and that his belief is a confirmation of the fact.

11) While the obedience of faith surely derives from a gift of God, it becomes our possession once given, and the scriptures therefore repeatedly refer to it as *our faith* (Lk 17:5, Heb 10:23 & 12:2, 1Jn 5:4) and *your faith* (Rom 1:8, 1Cor 2:5, Eph 1:15, Col 2:5, 1Thes 1:8, etc.). Yet Paul stated it was the obedience of Christ alone that secured a righteous state before God: “*For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous,*” (Rom 5:19). Therefore, a righteous state before God cannot be dependent upon the human obedience of faith.

As for Paul's claim that “*by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous,*” the word “shall” does not imply that a righteous standing before God is yet to be attained for the elect; rather, he is either speaking relative to the time of the fall, or else he is looking forward to the time when Christ's accomplishments will be fully realized. In only the prior verse he spoke of justification before God as being a completed fact: “*Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life,*” (vs 18). The same is done in the verse that follows: “*Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound,*” (vs 20).

12) While the instrumental view correctly claims that Old Testament saints were accounted righteous prior to the sacrifice of Christ upon the Divine purpose to fulfill the latter event, advocates of this position typically deny any such accounting prior to faith. This is an apparent inconsistency because the purpose to give faith was no less certain with God than His purpose to make Christ a sacrifice for sin. So this position has God considering His foreordination and foresight with respect to one event while ignoring it with respect to the other. If advocates of the instrumental view were to remedy this problem by allowing imputed righteousness on the basis of *foreseen* faith, they would then be resorting to a concept for which there is no scriptural support. The Bible never speaks of any man being justified by prospective faith, though it does speak of men being accounted righteous by the prospective sacrifice of Christ (Rom 3:25, 4:1-3). Now if both are factors to a righteous state before God, then there is no reason why one should be considered prior to the fact while the other should not. As they are indeed treated differently in this respect, it appears they are not both contributing factors. This observation supports the claim of the evidentiary position that a righteous state before God is established by the blood of Christ alone and that faith declares the fact.

13) Those variations of the instrumental view claiming that men are rendered righteous by means of evangelical faith have difficulty with the fact that Cornelius was considered cleansed by God before the gospel ever reached him. When the Lord commanded Peter to preach to Cornelius, and when Peter was not disposed to go, considering Gentiles to be unclean, the scripture then said, “*And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common,*” (Acts 10:15). The words “*hath cleansed*” definitely convey the idea that Cornelius had already been rendered righteous through the blood of Christ.

14) As the transaction producing a righteous state before God must be perfect with respect to its outcome, it follows that the transaction itself must be flawless in every phase. Human faith is never flawless, and is therefore unqualified as an instrument for the transaction.

The same imperfections are seen in human preaching, and this fact potentially compounds the difficulty of the instrumental position. If it is claimed that preaching is the divine instrument by which justifying faith is secured, and if this faith is taken to be the instrument by which a righteous state before God is secured, then it would follow that God uses two instruments in this matter, but with both being potentially flawed. This is not what one should expect when it is impossible to conceive of any Divine work in which perfection were more essential than the legal cleansing of the elect before God.

Children of God, upon seeing the imperfections in their faith, as well as in all things they do, are moved to put their trust in Christ alone, and not to depend upon anything in themselves, including their faith itself. This is a remarkable aspect of faith. It tends to become strengthened in its weakness and perfected in its own imperfection. When the child of God acknowledges his weakness of faith, he perceives a greater need of the mercy of God through the blood of Jesus, and this, strangely, is an increase of faith. Now the fact that faith has this inherent tendency to disclaim itself is a strong testimonial from the conscience that it is not a causative factor toward securing a righteous state before God. Yet the same consideration makes it the perfect criterion for powerfully confirming a saved state. Because faith has a nature to be resurrected in its own death, it is inherently indestructible, and through this process of dying only to rise again, and in greater power, it increasingly magnifies the Lord. At the same time, faith is utterly impossible in unregenerate men, because a man cannot truly believe anything that is contradicted by his own reasoning and experience. So nothing could be more sensible than for God to make faith the supreme criterion by which a saved state is known, but the same reasoning leading to this conclusion militates against it being a causative factor to a righteous state before God.

15) James claimed that justification is by both works and faith (Js 2:14-26), whereas Paul claimed it is by faith without works (Rom 3:28, 4:1-25). These claims can be reconciled by understanding that James was referring to works as they confirm faith, whereas Paul was referring to works when viewed independently of faith. Paul was also disclaiming the idea that works can serve as a grounds for true righteousness before God. James claimed that faith without works is dead because it is not truly faith, and therefore cannot denote a gracious state. Works without faith are dead because they are unacceptable to God, so these do not evidence a gracious state either. Now works done in faith justify only in the sense of manifesting a gracious state. They are not instrumental in any sense. James said nothing to indicate that faith justifies in any other sense.

This is not to say that faith and good works have equal roles in denoting a righteous state before God. Faith is the supreme criterion by which such a state is known. Good works are an *evidence* of eternal life, but true faith is a *confirmation* of it.

16) As faith is done away in heaven (1Cor 13:9-13), but our righteousness before God is not, it follows that the latter is not dependent on the former.

17) The sin of Adam was imputed to his posterity without consideration to their knowledge or consent. If the righteousness given by Christ to His posterity is truly analogous, as is asserted by Romans 5, then it must also have been done without consideration to their knowledge or consent.

18) All would agree that the book of Romans ranks second to none for the depths of its treatment on this subject. When introducing the subject, Paul stated:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. – Rom 1:16-17

This statement claims that the righteousness of God, meaning His imputed righteousness, is *revealed* by faith. It is not said to be *applied* by faith, as implied by the instrumental view. Had the instrumental view been intended, this would have been an ideal place to have stated it.

19) The instrumental position commonly argues that the Greek of Rom 3:25, 5:1, etc. implies an instrument role of faith as opposed to it being a cause or basis. A problem with this argument is that scriptures also speak of justification by *grace* (Rom 3:24 & Tit 3:7) and of justification by *blood* (Rom 5:9), but does so in Greek terms that are much the same as those sometimes used when speaking of the role of *faith* (e.g. Php 3:9). Hence, there was no intent on the part of Paul to convey the instrumental position via some systematic use of Greek terms and structures.

20) The scriptures never state that men are justified *by means of* faith; rather, they simply state that men are justified by faith and that this faith is *counted for* righteousness. With respect to the latter claim, the meaning must either be: a) Faith is a basis for righteousness. b) Faith is a token or confirmation of righteousness. c) Faith is a means unto righteousness. The first idea is disclaimed by all parties. The second idea is claimed by the evidentiary view. The third idea is the instrumental view. Of these three interpretations, the instrumental view construes the words in the most unnatural way. For example, a diploma is *counted for* graduation and so are academic qualifications, but not books, pencils, lectures and *means* unto those qualifications. A Congressional Medal of Honor is *counted for* heroism and patriotism, and the same may be said of the dedication, self-sacrifice and bravery warranting the medal, but one would not say that the guns, hand grenades, tanks, etc. were *counted for* heroism. Abstractly stated, means unto an end are not *counted for* that end, or at least not when they are contemplated as means, because this would confound the very distinction intended between means and ends.

The evidentiary position is stated with particular clarity in:

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.
– Eph 1:11-13

Hence, the consequence of believing is to be “sealed” with the Holy Spirit of promise. By “sealed” the apostle meant “certified,” and the allusion was to the practice of ancient authorities to certify documents by attaching a piece of clay and stamping it with a signet. Now a certificate could be a highly prized possession, yet it contributes nothing toward what it certifies. For example, a diploma is prized by all who have it and is desired by those who do not, but a diploma never read a book nor passed an exam nor was it ever a means to such. It certifies that academic qualifications have been met, but is neither a cause nor means unto those qualifications. The same is true of belief in Jesus Christ. It certifies that a man is saved, and is therefore his prized possession, but it is neither a cause nor means toward what it certifies.

Some Objections Considered

Q1) Whereas Rom 8:29 places justification after effectual calling, and 1Cor 6:11 places it after sanctification, would this not imply that justification follows faith?

A) The issue is not whether justification follows faith. It does in the declarative sense. The issue is whether faith is a means contributing to the righteousness it declares.

Q2) Since Eph 2:8 states that we are saved by grace “*through faith*,” does it not follow that faith is a means unto our righteousness in Christ before God?

A) This objection does not prove the instrumental position; rather, it interprets the text from the perspective of that position. Yet much in the context favors the evidentiary view. This view says all of the elect family were rendered righteous at once and *together*, whereas the instrumental position has this happening at different times for different people. Now the verses leading up to 2:8 have emphasized the fact that all the elect family were quickened *together* with Christ and raised up *together* with Christ, then in verses that follow, they are made one in Christ and *together* reconciled unto God through the body of Christ. As it seems impossible that God could be reconciled to the corporate body without being reconciled to the individuals within it, the powerful suggestion is that each and all were accounted righteous *together*. When Paul said all elect were quickened together in Christ, the meaning is that the way to their quickening was made sure, which would at least imply that all legal claims against them were met.

The words “*saved through faith*” derive from the fact that salvation can never be experienced where it is not perceived. Even a man in heaven itself could not be saved without the eyes and ears to perceive his locale. Almost never do the scriptures describe

a man as “saved” until he has been brought into the knowledge and assurance of what has been done in his behalf. It is in this sense that he is “*saved through faith.*” Accordingly, the elect were not “saved” at Calvary under a scriptural definition of the term. Rather, it was there that the way to their salvation was made sure.

Q3) Rom 4:2-3 states, “*For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.*” Does this not cause righteousness to follow faith?

A) Indeed it does, but not in any way that would support the instrumental position. Nothing in the statement would suggest that the faith of Abraham was a mere *means* unto the final effect. The statement asserts too much for this. Indeed, it asserts so much that even Arminians feel compelled to qualify it in their explanations. Now there are only two possible conclusions that intuitive interpretation of the words will allow: a) That his faith was of sufficient merit in itself to serve in lieu of good works and to expiate for all his faults and failures, leaving him a righteous man, or b) That his faith was here ordained by God as the certification of righteousness he acquired from another source. Simply stated, he was either righteous *because of* his faith, or else he was *demonstrably* righteous *because of* his faith. Faith here is not a mere means to the conclusion; it is the very basis of that conclusion, which leaves us with no reasonable recourse but the second of our two alternatives. Not even Arminians accept the first.

This conclusion is further supported when the context of Gn 15:6 is considered. This is the scripture from which Paul argued his case here. We have it upon New Testament authority that this ancient event concerning Abraham was intended by God to portend far greater things to come, even His ultimate purpose and plan for the salvation of His people. The Old Testament assertion that Abraham’s faith was accounted to him for righteousness has a distinguishing peculiarity that suggests profoundness. The statement was calculated to capture the attention and intrigue the mind. One of the first questions it provokes has to do the timing of its occurrence. This was not the first time God made promise to Abraham concerning Christ, nor the first time that Abraham believed it. All this happened in Gn 12:3, and the fact that Abraham sincerely believed on that earlier event would be powerfully confirmed by him leaving his home and people and moving to a land wherein he was a stranger. This shows that, in the literal sense, Abraham was regenerated long prior to Gn 15:6, making it inconceivable that he could still be accounted condemned. But I will disregard this fact for the sake of argument and consider only the symbolic aspects of the message.

So for what symbolic purpose was the reckoning of righteousness deferred to the later event? A likely explanation can be found in the verses leading up to Gn 15:6 where Melchizedec, a strong type of Christ, went to Abraham carrying bread and wine for the purpose of blessing him. Bread and wine would of course be the very symbols used in the New Testament to represent the body and blood of the Lord. The Bible then follows this with the account of Abraham believing and his faith being reckoned for righteousness. The New Testament would make both these events important allegorical lessons concerning eternal redemption. Now if we consider these events together, and in

the order in which they occurred, the symbolic message would be that Christ became part of Abraham when he partook the symbols of Christ's body and blood, and Abraham was then in possession of His righteousness. "*Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day,*" (Jn 6:54-55). Yet, because this accounting in Christ would otherwise be unknowable outside the mind of God, it was needful to men that there be a visible confirmation of this work, which will explain why the symbolic lesson continued with the faith of Abraham being reckoned to him for righteousness. Thus, the complete lesson strongly supports the evidentiary position in its claim that faith is imputed for righteousness in the sense of giving it visible certification.

Q4) Rom 4:23-24 states, "*Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead...*" Do not the words "*shall be*" imply the imputation of righteousness is contingent on faith?

A) The intent of this text is to show that our own case is parallel to that of Abraham, so the answer given to the prior question is sufficient for this one also. However, it may be added that the text embraces *ongoing* believers, not merely prospective ones, and only two verses later the same individuals are described as *already* justified by faith. Practically all doctrines of justification agree that the ongoing believer is already accounted as righteous and justified. So the words "*shall be*" either refer to ultimate benefits (e.g. acquittal at the final judgment) or, what is more likely, they are anticipatory relative to the times of Abraham. For example, the same Greek word for "shall" is translated in Gal 3:23 as "should afterwards."

The Importance of Justification By Faith

When the evidentiary position says the role of faith is to confirm a righteous state, not to produce it, critics react by accusing the position of reducing the principle of justification by faith to the subjective business of assurance. They say this cannot possibly assign to faith the significance it is given in the Bible. These criticisms would have merit if true but are actually far from it. The truth is that the evidentiary position assigns to faith an importance second only to causes that produce it.

In the matter of assurance, a man may question *himself*, but he is never to question: "*He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life,*" (Jn 5:24). This principle is both objective and absolute, and stands regardless of whether a man doubts himself or is sure. Being justified by faith and having assurance are connected ideas but are not the same. A man may question whether what he feels in his heart is the genuine Divine stamp, but he can always be sure that the genuine Divine stamp is in fact faith in Jesus Christ. This is the Divinely-ordained certificate of a blood-washed man. A man may have all assurance in the world, but if no faith in Jesus Christ, then his assurance is delusional, and he may have all doubt in the world, yet if truly believing on Jesus Christ, then his doubts are equally delusional.

All assurance that any man has of heaven must ultimately be anchored in the principle of justification by faith. So this principle is not assurance but is what makes true assurance possible. Even the temporal blessings of God offer no real assurance without it. A man cannot base his hope of heaven simply on the fact that God has caused his corn to grow. This is because God causes His rain to fall on both the just and the unjust. We must also allow that any temporal blessing presumed to be our own may have actually been intended for someone else. Laban was blessed with prosperity, but he knew it was on account of Jacob, not himself. For such reasons, temporal blessings of themselves do not convey assurance. It is the principle of justification by faith that transforms them into treasure having eternal implications. When the farmer rejoices to see his prayer answered with the falling rain on his corn, and when he is moved by this to a greater trust in God and in the name of His Son in which he prayed, then the blessing of the rain is moved far beyond the mere production of corn to a promise of infinitely more. The providence of God in his behalf has upheld and strengthened his faith, and then the principle of justification by faith carried this to a true assurance of heaven. In absence of this principle, all providence of God in our behalf would bear no implications except what would eventually return to dust.

Such assurances are the *sine-quo-non* of all real confidence, peace, hope and joy. Any presumed temporal blessing that does not convey true assurance will soon return to dust. Any blessing that conveys it is of greater value than the Universe itself. Assurance is the greatest and only enduring benefit that can derive from any temporal blessing. For example, if a man has a malignant tumor, but is healed by a merciful God who hears his prayer, that man will still know that in sufficient time he will be just as dead as if his request had been denied. The enduring benefit of the healing is that it shows the love of God for him, and since the love of God is eternal, only one such blessing would mean infinitely more than all other pleasures of life combined. This explains why our happiness hinges on assurance. A child of God can happily walk through hell if confident that Jesus is holding his hand, but no amount of luxury can alleviate his misery if he feels God-forsaken. So assurance is a crucial matter, and if the principle of justification by faith is necessary to make it real, then it is not to be confused with assurance itself, but is the all-important foundation upon which assurance must be built.

These observations serve to explain Paul's famous and intriguing statement: "*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,*" (Heb 11:1). Hence, faith is not hope but is the foundation of hope. It is not in lieu of evidence but is evidence itself, serving as palpable proof of what could not otherwise be knowable to human sense. As the visible world serves as evidence of an invisible God (vs 3), so heartfelt faith serves as evidence of a salvation that cannot always be felt in a world of sin and sorrow.

In his profound statement concerning faith recorded here, Paul said nothing of it being a means or instrument to making a man righteous. Rather, he said, "*For by it the elders obtained a good report,*" (vs 2). While the Old Testament saints were generally people of upright character, the Bible placed too much emphasis on their faults and failings to have intended to distinguish them by their works. Rather, they were set apart from others in their wicked world in that they looked to the Lord for mercy, for forgiveness, for

correction, for understanding, for help, for assurance and for salvation. This is why they were also the people who witnessed and experienced the greatest workings of God the world had ever known, many of which the Apostle would recount in the remainder of this chapter. Yet their faith was not the ultimate cause of these things, nor even an instrument to bringing them to pass; rather, the opposite was true. Their faith, oftentimes being weakest at the most crucial points, was revived and strengthened by these mighty works of God. And indeed, those mighty works were no doubt done also for the purpose of strengthening faith in millions thereafter. So whether it be the faith or the mighty works observed by the faith, both were by the hand of God. Yet God, in the interest of His own glory, has ordered and ordained that these things accompany each other.

Now the joyous revelation of the New Testament, beginning with the teachings of the Savior Himself, is that the marriage God has ordained between faith and His mighty works is not limited to parting seas, swimming axe heads, tamed lions and other such temporal marvels, but it also extends into eternity itself, accompanying the mighty workings of God in the *eternal* salvation of His people. So that as we look upon any Old Testament saint in retrospect, we can see that his faith not only accompanied temporal wonders, but that in such faith “*he obtained witness that he was righteous*” (vs 4) – not comparatively but absolutely. Obviously not of himself, but through the capstone of all Divine wonders – the eternal salvation of God’s people through our Lord Jesus Christ.