

The Just Shall Live By Faith

It is one of the fundamental principles of The Truth, that no man can earn a right to Salvation, as if it were deserved as wages for work done. The only wages a man is entitled to in Yahweh's eyes is death, for it is written: "the wages of sin is death ..." (Rom. 6:23). Working works of sin, men become worthy of its wages – death - for that is the only thing that King Sin is able to offer. But the Apostle does not stop there; he continues to say that: "... *the gift of God is eternal life* through Jesus Christ our Master". Eternal life then, is a "*gift*" granted to those individuals who eschew every work of sin, and who show faithfulness to the One who redeemed them by the shedding of his blood. As we read elsewhere: "by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is the gift of God*: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship ..." (Eph. 2:8-10).

The transformation of a sinner into a saint is, in fact, entirely a work of the Almighty. As we read above, "we are *his workmanship*." Again, it is testified that: "it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13; cp. 1 Thes. 2:13). Salvation, then, does not come about by ourselves, and our own works - on the contrary it is a process entirely devised and worked out by the Father who begat us with the Word of Truth. This is not to detract from the other important truth, that a man's faith must be manifested in righteous works (cp Jas. 2:18). But it is rather that those very works themselves come about by the influence of the Spirit-Word within our hearts. The faith that a man has, and shows forth in his conduct of life, forms the basis of redemption, and the subsequent transformation into immortality.

These principles are bound up together in the words that came through the prophet Habakkuk, which we have taken as the title of this paper. In chapter two, it is stated: "Behold his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but *the just shall live by his faith*" (Hab. 2:4). Notice the implication in this contrast: a man who is Just is not a man whose soul is elevated in pride, but one who will be given life as a consequence of, and reward for, his faith. King Uzziah provides us with an example of unbelief for us to take heed to: "When he was strong, *his heart was lifted up* to his destruction ..." (2 Chron. 26:16). Though he began his reign by trusting in Yahweh's hand to deliver him from his enemies, and make his kingdom prosperous, Uzziah became puffed up in his pride - and fell from his position of Grace. As the Proverb goes: "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). Seeking to enter into the Divine Presence on his own supposed merits rather than through the appointed High Priest, he was struck with leprosy in his forehead, and remained a leper until the day of his death.

This passage of Habakkuk is cited three times in the New Testament, and on each occasion a different aspect of the phrase is brought out. We shall, therefore proceed to examine each in turn:

Romans chapter 1 speaks of "the Gospel of Christ," which is "the power of God unto salvation", and tells us that "therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, *the just shall live by faith*" (Rom. 1:16-18). The emphasis in this chapter is on *Righteousness*, and *Faith*. In fact, the aspect of justification through

faith is a major theme in Romans. It is in the Gospel that the Father's *Righteousness* is revealed for the development of *faith*. The Law testified to that Righteousness to come: "now the righteousness of God outside the Law is manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe ..." (Rom. 3:21-22). Being witnessed by the Law, the Righteousness of Yahweh was revealed in all its fullness in Messiah, and the means of Redemption that would come through him. It is that Righteousness that we should seek first, with the Kingdom (Mat. 6:33), that we might become complete in Him.

The word "just" as in "the **Just** shall live by faith" is the same in the Greek as the word "righteous". It is the Righteous who shall be rewarded with life – but not as a legal entitlement as in wages for work done; rather, it will be through the development and outworking of Faith. Roman Chapter 4 picks up this theme, in speaking of Abraham: "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness ..." (Rom. 4:3-5). Men, therefore, become considered to be "Righteous" by Yahweh, as a consequence of the faith that they manifest in day to day living. Through belief in, and obedience to the Gospel, sinners become saints in the sight of the Most High. And being considered "Just", they shall live by their faith in the Age to Come.

Galatians chapter 3 continues this theme. Because the sinfulness of human nature is too strong to be constantly withstood by any but Messiah himself, all men are "without strength" (Rom. 5:6) to save themselves. And so the Apostle exhorted the believers in Galatia: "as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse ... But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for **the just shall live by faith**" (Gal. 3:11). The teaching here, is that no man can be considered righteous (justified) through perfect obedience, but through faith.

Whereas the emphasis in Romans was on the means of becoming "Just", and the "Righteousness" that the Gospel declares, the emphasis in Galatians chapter 3, is that it is through "faith" that a man might be given life. All who seek to be justified through obedience to the Law are doomed to failure, for all men are naturally sinful, and unable to render perfect obedience: "if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be **given** to them that believe" (Gal. 3:21-22). The Law brought a knowledge of sin, but the faith of Jesus Christ is able to save men from their sins. By faith in Christ, the gift of life will be given to those who believe. It is interesting that the apostle cites this passage of Habakkuk to prove this point: - the point being that according to the prophet who spoke as he was "moved" by the Holy Spirit, the Just shall be given life by "faith", not "law". It would be a beneficial study, to examine the topic of Justification by Faith as taught in the Old Testament, and this verse would seem to be a good starting point. Maybe, if Yahweh wills, we shall come back to this sometime in the future.

The final citation is in Hebrews Chapter 10:

“for yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now ***the just shall live by faith***: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back into perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul” (Heb. 10:37-38).

Whilst in this place, the themes of righteousness and faithfulness are spoken of again, the emphasis is on *life*. We have faith, or belief to: “the saving of the soul”. King Saul was a man who drew back, or “turned back” (1 Sam. 15:11) from following Yahweh, and so lost his life, and those of his sons also. But the Just, like David remain steadfast in faith that their lives may not be lost to the powers of sin, but may rather be “saved”, and preserved into the Kingdom of their Father.

In the citation of Habakkuk’s words then, we find three different aspects being brought out: “the **Just** (Rom. 1:17) shall **Live** (Heb. 10:38) by **Faith** (Gal. 3:11). But the last quotation that we looked at in Hebrews also quotes the verse before the one we have been considering: “for yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the Just shall Live by Faith ...” (Heb. 10:37-38). Compare this with Habakkuk 2:3-4: “the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: ***though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry***”.

The Apostle, under inspiration, relates these words to the coming of Christ. Though it may seem to men that a long time has elapsed since these words were given, the vision shall certainly come, when our Master shall arrive to take up his dominion. We have seen how the Spirit uses the words “the just shall live by faith”, but when we consider the context of waiting for Messiah to come, the implication is that the “faith” we are to have, is particularly in his Return. It is an exhortation to patience in waiting. Indeed, this is the immediate context of Hebrews chapter 10: “ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise (Heb. 10:36). We must, therefore, occupy ourselves with doing the Will of our Father in the time that remains, constantly watching for the coming of our Redeemer to deliver us from the body of this death, and make us like him: glorious, immortal, and freed at last from the law of sin and death.

In our day, men mock the idea of the Creator’s judgments coming upon the earth – as did the ancients of old. They come “walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? ... but, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:3-4, 8-9). The fact remains that Yahweh has appointed a day in which He shall judge the world by the One whom He raised from the dead (Acts 17:31), and it is our part to heed the warning given, and prepare for that day. The duration of days which appear to men as being a long time is but “a little while” in the Divine estimation, and though men may grow weary of waiting, at the appointed time the vision shall become a reality. In that day, truly it shall be given to “the just” to “live by faith”.

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