

SOME CLASSIC WORKS ON JUSTIFICATION

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Commentary on Galatians, by **Martin Luther**. Kregel Classics, 1979. Pp. 384. ISBN, 0 8254 3124 7

The doctrine of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) is the fundamental principle of the Reformation. In his acclaimed and prized commentary, Luther irrefutably defends justification by faith alone apart from the works of the law. This is an exceptional apology of what continues to be a controversial doctrine. Using stern language and an aggressive polemic style that is unsurpassed, the famed Reformer captivates the reader in this unique verse-by-verse exposition. I thoroughly enjoyed this engaging book.

Luther hails the doctrine of justification by God's free grace through faith alone. The righteousness that justifies sinners comes from God through faith in the merit of Christ and is imputed to our account by God. The faith itself is a gift and grace from God and is the only instrument through which we are justified. The righteousness of faith is apart from the works of the law or ceremony. It is a passive righteousness not earned or achieved through the merit of man as opposed to an active righteousness which man purports to achieve, but fails to meet the perfect standard God requires. The righteousness that justifies has its origin from God and its merit in Christ. Luther exalts free grace and justification by faith alone. With strong language, he denounces those who mingle law and grace calling them such things as "false apostles," "black devils," "troublers of the church," "blind guides," and "perverters of the gospel." He minces no words and repudiates all false teachers who pervert free grace.

Concerning Luther's commentaries, this is his Magnus opus and is invaluable. It is a priceless contribution to the doctrine of justification and vital resource for every Christian. A timeless classic for today, it is understandable, and packed with information. It will encourage you and inspire the reader to stand and defend the gospel "which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

As Luther would say:

What are the papists (I pray you), yea, the best of them all, but destroyers of the Kingdom of Christ, and builders up of the kingdom of the devil and sin, of wrath and damnation? Yes, they destroy the Church which is God's building, not by the law of Moses, as did the false apostles, but by men's traditions and doctrines of devils. But we, by the grace of Christ, holding the article of justification, do assuredly know that we are justified, and reputed righteous before God by faith only in Christ. Therefore we do not mingle law and grace, faith and works together: but we separate them far asunder. (p. 80)

Justification, by **Archibald Alexander Hodge**.

A.A. Hodge (1823-1886) was the son of notable theologian Charles Hodge. Named after Archibald Alexander, the first principal of Princeton Seminary, Hodge was an American Presbyterian leader.

Hodge presents a clear teaching on the doctrine of justification in his article on the subject that can be found in his book *Outlines of Theology* (Banner of Truth, ISBN 0851511600) or online.¹ Hodge demonstrates the doctrine as represented by Scripture and through the eyes of various inspired writers. Written with exceptional clarity, he furnishes an excellent essay on the subject.

Justification is one of the main themes and doctrines of the Bible. The Old Testament instructs us that we are justified by faith alone apart from works; Abraham believed God and “it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Rom 4:3 KJV). The New Testament also attests to the free grace of God by being “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ” (Rom 3.24). After illustrating how the law condemns a sinner, Hodge explains why it can never justify a guilty person: “the just shall live by faith” (Rom 1:17). He vindicates the supreme excellence of Christ’s righteousness as our only merit in salvation.

Providing a large number of Scripture references from both the Old and New Testaments, Hodge writes a delightful exposition on the doctrine and a valuable resource for anyone interested in furthering their knowledge on this subject.

A quote from the article:

The fact that a man is forgiven, implies that he is guilty; and the fact that he is guilty, implies that his justification cannot rest upon his own character or conduct.

The Doctrine of Justification: An Outline of its History in the Church and of its Exposition from Scripture, by **James Buchanan**. The Banner of Truth Trust: 1991. Pp. 514. ISBN, 0-85151-440-5

James Buchanan (1804-1870) was born in Paisley and was known as an eloquent preacher and prolific writer.

Buchanan sets forth an extensive work on the doctrine of justification which J. I. Packer in the Introductory Essay says is the preeminent book on the subject from the viewpoint of covenant theology. There are few works written on the doctrine that are as exhaustive and thorough. It might be better termed the atlas of the doctrine because of its immensity and completeness. Coming from the heart of a pastor, it has a warm sense about it and is overall a great achievement.

Buchanan wrote the book to recapitulate the historic orthodox doctrine and show how some have strayed from the faith. Throughout history, it has been opposed through the “spirit of

¹ <http://www.graceonlinelibrary.org/articles/full.asp?id=13|17|376>

self righteousness,” “corrupted by human inventions,” and “sometimes perverted and abused by Antinomian license.” Buchanan traces the history of the doctrine and describes the great controversy throughout Protestant history. Listing the various heresies that arise from God’s free grace, he describes several as they have appeared in history. He presents a thorough and incomparable analysis of the doctrine, including “the law and justice of God” and how the law can never justify a condemned sinner. Buchanan demonstrates how “the mediatorial work of Christ” was “formed in the eternal councils of the Godhead before the world was.” He explains how the immediate ground of a sinner’s justification is “the imputed righteousness of Christ” and exalts the preeminence of Christ’s righteousness.

Although it is a lengthy doctrinal book, it is stimulating and easy to read and would be an outstanding book for pastors, ministers, seminarians, or those who desire a complete discussion on this topic. I highly recommend it for anyone, especially considering the conflict that is appearing in the Reformed churches today.

A selected quote:

Accordingly, we find that, in Scripture, the punishment of sin, which is the penalty of the Law—and the pardon of sin, which is the privilege of the Gospel—are brought together and harmonized in a propitiation, in which justice and mercy are equally displayed. (p. 310)²

Justification Vindicated, by **Robert Traill**. The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002. Pp. 77. ISBN, 0 85151 818 4

Robert Traill (1632-1716) was born in Elie, the son of a Scottish Covenanter minister. A Presbyterian pastor following in the steps of his father of the same name, he was persecuted and exiled to Bass Rock during the “Killing Times.”

Originally written under the title *A Vindication of the Protestant Doctrine Concerning Justification from the Unjust Charge of Antinomianism*, this book was subsequently republished under the current title *Justification Vindicated*. Traill presents a brief but excellent defense of the orthodox doctrine of justification, largely to combat the assailing Antinomians of the day. Antinomianism is a false teaching that practices liberation from the law of God which results in using free grace as a license for sin, and is denounced by the Apostle Paul in Rom 6:1-2. Traill manifests a powerful defense against the erroneous teaching and a masterful apology for the doctrine of justification. Demonstrating an aggressive approach toward the doctrine, Traill repudiates the heretics of his day and extols the gospel of God’s free grace. This is a wonderful book that the reader will find profitable and inspiring.

It was the justifying grace of God that provoked the Antinomian controversy. Traill provides an understandable account of the difference between sanctification and justification and teaches us how the imputed righteousness of Christ is the only merit of our justification.

² The entire book is now available online: <http://www.gracecarlisle.org.uk/books/Buchanan/6.pdf>.

Traill's account of the doctrine of justification is worthwhile to those who desire to read a condensed work on this subject. Benefited by its instruction on the doctrine, the reader will learn how the law of God is the perfect rule of life for the Christian. It is a classic book on the subject and is respected for its clarity and accuracy.

A good quote:

But when they draw near to the awful tribunal, what else is in their eye and heart but only free grace, ransoming blood, and a well ordered covenant in Christ the Surety? They cannot bear to hear any make mention to them of their holiness, their own grace and attainments. (p. 32)

Faith & Justification, by **Theodore Beza** (1519-1605). Taken from chapter four (sections 1-13) of the French Theologian's book, *The Christian Faith*, translated into English by James Clark. Focus Christian Ministries Trust, East Essex England, 1992. The electronic edition scanned and edited by Shane Rosenthal for Modern Reformation Online. Original pagination retained. The title was created for the online edition, and is not found in the original.³

This short treatise was popular during the Reformation. The article explains how the Holy Spirit "makes us partakers of Jesus Christ by faith alone." It presents a short but precise account of the role of faith in our justification. Faith is the "sole instrument by which we take hold of Jesus Christ when he is offered to us, the sole vessel to receive him (John 3:1-13; 33-36)." It is a wonderful essay on the subject, and includes innumerable Scripture references.⁴

Justification: Forensic or Moral? by **Francis Turretin** (1623-1687). This article has been extracted from Turretin's *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae* (Question 16).

This is an outstanding article on the forensic nature of justification. The Genevan Reformer describes the forensic meaning and demonstrates why the Bible does not constitute a moral sense of justification as the Romanists advocate. A forensic understanding would include a judicial process with laws, "accused persons who are guilty, Rom 3:19"; "a handwriting contrary to us, Col 2:14"; "of divine justice demanding punishment, Rom 3:24, 26"; "of an advocate pleading the cause, 1 John 2:1"; "of satisfaction and imputed righteousness, Rom 4 and 5"; "of a throne of grace before which we are absolved, Heb 4:16"; "of a Judge pronouncing sentence, Rom 3:20, and absolving sinners, Rom 4:5." The Papists employ the term improperly by denoting a moral meaning and infusing righteousness to the sinner. Turretin repudiates their false teaching and sets forth the proper Scriptural interpretation.

³ This information is taken from <http://www.modernreformation.org/tbfaith.htm>.

⁴ You can find this distinguished article on the web: <http://www.modernreformation.org/tbfaith.htm>.

A worthy article and outstanding polemic against infused righteousness, I recommend this respected work on this subject.⁵

⁵ You can find this excellent article on the web:
http://reformedperspectives.org/newfiles/fra_turretin/TH.Turretin.justification.html. The information in the first paragraph about this extract has been taken from this website.