

## *Selections on Justification from Before the Reformation*

Unless otherwise indicated, all selections are from *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, or from *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, et al. and were copied from <http://ccel.org/>.

### *Protestant Teaching*

#### *London Confession 11.1*

Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing Christ's active obedience unto the whole law, and passive obedience in his death for their whole and sole righteousness by faith, which faith they have not of themselves; it is the gift of God.

(<http://www.vor.org/truth/1689/1689bc11.html>)

### *Late Medieval Catholic Teaching*

#### Thomas Aquinas

The aforesaid four things required for the justification of the ungodly are simultaneous in time, since the justification of the ungodly is not successive ...; but in the order of nature, one is prior to another; and in their natural order the first is the infusion of grace; the second, the free-will's movement towards God; the third, the free-will's movement towards [i.e., against] sin; the fourth, the remission of sin. (*Summa Theologica*, Part 1 of Part 2, question 113, answer 8)

### *Ante-Nicene Witnesses*

#### Clement of Rome to the Corinthians (I Clement) chap. 32

Whosoever will candidly consider each particular, will recognise the greatness of the gifts which were given by him. For from him have sprung the priests and all the Levites who minister at the altar of God. From him also [was descended] our Lord Jesus Christ according to the flesh. From him [arose] kings, princes, and rulers of the race of Judah. Nor are his other tribes in small glory, inasmuch as God had promised, "Thy seed shall be as the stars of heaven." All these, therefore, were highly honoured, and made great, not for their own sake, or for their own works, or for the righteousness which they wrought, but through the operation of His will. And we, too, being called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom, or understanding, or godliness, or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart; but by that faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

#### Chap. 30:3

Let us clothe ourselves in concord, being lowlyminded and temperate, holding ourselves aloof from all back biting and evil speaking, being justified by works and not by words.

Epistle to Diognetus (J. B. Lightfoot trans.)

9:2 And when our iniquity had been fully accomplished, and it had been made perfectly manifest that punishment and death were expected as its recompense, and the season came which God had ordained, when henceforth He should manifest His goodness and power (O the exceeding great kindness and love of God), He hated us not, neither rejected us, nor bore us malice, but was long-suffering and patient, and in pity for us took upon Himself our sins, and Himself parted with His own Son as a ransom for us, the holy for the lawless, the guileless for the evil, the just for the unjust, the incorruptible for the corruptible, the immortal for the mortal.

9:3 For what else but His righteousness would have covered our sins?

9:4 In whom was it possible for us lawless and ungodly men to have been justified, save only in the Son of God?

9:5 O the sweet exchange, O the inscrutable creation, O the unexpected benefits; that the iniquity of many should be concealed in One Righteous Man, and the righteousness of One should justify many that are iniquitous!

9:6 Having then in the former time demonstrated the inability of our nature to obtain life, and having now revealed a Saviour able to save even creatures which have no ability, He willed that for both reasons we should believe in His goodness and should regard Him as nurse, father, teacher, counsellor, physician, mind, light, honour, glory, strength and life.

Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* chap. 35

So He fulfilled the promise made to Abraham by God, that He would make his seed like the stars of heaven; for Christ did this by being born of the Virgin who came of Abraham's seed, and setting up as lights in the world those who believe in Him, justifying the Gentiles through the same faith with Abraham. For *Abraham believed God, and it was reputed to him unto justice; in like manner we too are justified by believing God, for a just man shall live by faith. So not through the law was the promise to Abraham, but through faith. For Abraham was justified by faith, and the law is not made for the just man. So too are we justified not through the law, but through the faith of Him to whom witness was borne by the law and the prophets whom the Word of God brought to us.* (Trans. Joseph P. Smith, Ancient Christian Writers series, vol. 16)

Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 3.9.3

Who has been justified by faith alone without the works of the law? Thus, in my opinion, that thief who was crucified with Christ should suffice for a suitable example. He called out to him from the cross, "Lord Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom!" In the Gospel nothing else is recorded about his good works, but for the sake of this faith alone Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you: Today you will be with me in paradise." If it seems appropriate, let us now apply the words of the Apostle Paul to the case of this thief and say to the Jews, "Where then is your boasting?" Certainly it is excluded, but excluded not through the law of works but through the law of faith. For through faith this thief was justified without works of the law, since the Lord did not require in addition to this that he should first accomplish works, nor did he wait for him to perform some works when he had believed. But by his confession alone the one who was about to begin this journey to

paradise received him as a justified traveling companion with himself. (Trans. Thomas P. Scheck, Fathers of the Church series, vol. 103)

Parallel to Origen in John Chrysostom, *Eight Sermons on the Book of Genesis*, Sermon 7

Let us see, however, whether the brigand gave evidence of effort and upright deeds and a good yield. Far from his being able to claim even this, he made his way into paradise before the apostles with a mere word, on the basis of faith alone, the intention being for you to learn that it was not so much a case of his sound values prevailing as the Lord's lovingkindness being completely responsible. (*Eight Sermons on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Robert Charles Hall (Boston: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004), 123.)

### Nicene and Post-Nicene Witnesses

John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, Homily 2

[H]e adds also righteousness; and righteousness, not thine own, but that of God; hinting also the abundance of it and the facility. For you do not achieve it by toilings and labors, but you receive it by a gift from above, contributing one thing only from your own store, "believing." Then since his statement did not seem credible, if the adulterer and effeminate person, and robber of graves, and magician, is not only to be suddenly freed from punishment but to become just, and just too with the highest righteousness; he confirms his assertion from the Old Testament. And first with a short sentence, he lays open a vast sea of histories to one who has a capacity for seeing them. For after having said, "from faith to faith," he sends the hearer back to the dispensations of God, which took place thus in the Old Testament, which, when writing to the Hebrews, he explains with his usual great wisdom, showing that both the just and the sinners were justified in that way even then, wherefore also he made mention both of the harlot and of Abraham. But then here, after having just hinted at it (for he was running on to another and a pressing subject), he again confirms what he had said from the Prophets, bringing in Habakkuk before them, crying, and saying, that it is not in the nature of things for him who is to live, to live otherwise save by faith; for "the just," he says, "shall live by faith" (Hab. 2:4), speaking about the life to come....

Thus shone also all those aforetime, thus Abraham, thus Isaac, thus Jacob, thus too the harlot was saved, the one in the Old Testament, and likewise the one in the New. For, "by faith," he says, "the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not when she had received the spies" (Heb. 11:31.). For if she had said to herself, "and how can they that are captives and exiles, and refugees, and live the life of vagabond tribes, get the better of us who have a city, and walls, and towers?" she would have destroyed both herself and them. Which also the forefathers of those who were then saved did suffer. For when, upon the sight of men great and tall, they questioned the manner of victory, they perished, without battle or array, all of them. Seest thou what a pit is that of unbelief! what a wall that of faith! For the one carried down endless thousands, the other not only saved a harlot, but made her the patroness of so numerous a people!

Augustine and Alypius to Paulinus (Letter 186)

Let no one say to himself: “If it [justification] is of faith, how is it freely given? If faith earns it, why is it not rather paid than given?” Let the faithful man not say that because, when he says: “I have faith that I may earn justification,” he is answered: “What hast thou that hast not received?” [I Cor. 4:7]. Therefore, since faith asks for and receives justification, “according as God hath divided to every one the measure of faith” [Rom. 12:3], no human merit precedes the grace of God, but grace itself merits an increase, and the increase merits perfection, with the will accompanying it, not going before; following behind it, not pointing the way. ... Thus, this very merit of man is a free gift, and no one deserves to receive anything from the Father of lights from whom every best gift comes down, except by receiving what he does not deserve. (Trans. Wilfrid Parsons, *Fathers of the Church* series, vol. 30)

Augustine, *On Faith and Works*, 13:20; 14.21

“Although in Scripture one set of instructions sometimes is found without the other, either faith alone or good works alone instead of the complete doctrine, it is to be understood that one cannot be without the other” (13.20; *Fathers of the Church* series; 27:246)

“When the Apostle [Paul] says, then, that in his opinion man is justified through faith without the works of the Law [Rom. 4], he does not intend by this decision to express contempt for the commandments and the works of justice by the profession of faith, but to inform anyone that he can be justified by faith even if he has not previously fulfilled the works of the Law; for they follow when one has been justified, and do not come before for one to be justified.” (14.21; *Fathers of the Church* series; 27:247)

Ambrosiaster

(From Ambrosiaster, *Commentaries on Romans and 1-2 Corinthians*, Ancient Christian Texts, IVP 2009)

On Romans 3:24—They are justified freely, because they have not done anything nor given anything in return, but by faith alone they have been made holy by the gift of God.

On Romans 4:5—How then can the Jews think that they have been justified by the works of the law in the same way as Abraham, when they see that Abraham was not justified by the works of the law, but by faith alone? Therefore, there is no need of the law, when the ungodly person is justified before God by faith alone.

On Romans 9:28—The Lord promises that those whom he calls the remnant will be saved by the just execution of the sentence on the earth ... that is, by faith, because now that new moons, the sabbath, circumcision, the food laws and animal sacrifices have all been abolished, it is faith alone which is given for salvation.

### Medieval Citation

Peter the Venerable on the Petrobrusians

“The first article of the heretics declares that children under the age of discretion cannot be saved by Christian baptism, nor can they be benefited by the faith of others who cannot use their own faith, because, according to them, one is saved by his own faith and baptism, not by another’s.” (Joseph Cowley Reagan, “Did the Petrobrusians Teach Salvation by Faith Alone?” *The Journal of Religion* 7 [Jan. 1927]: 84)

Alternate Translation: Petrobrusians deny “that infants presented before the age of understanding can be saved through the baptism of Christ and that another’s faith can be of advantage to those who cannot exercise their own, since ... not another’s faith but one’s own brings salvation through baptism.” (Walter Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1969], 120.)

*Evidence for “Suppressed” Teaching of Justification by Faith Alone?*

Augustine, *Retractions*, 35

Refers to “certain writings which separated Christian faith and good works so as to lead one to believe that it is impossible to attain eternal salvation without the former [faith], but it is possible to do so without the latter [works].” (Fathers of the Church series, 60:198)

Augustine, *On Faith and Works*, 27.49

Says that to his opponents “the candidates must be taught faith alone prior to baptism, and, after baptism, instructed in Christian morality.” (Fathers of the Church series; 27:281)

Augustine, *On Faith and Works*

However, he is actually answering a form of “easy believism” that said repentance was not necessary before baptism (8.12; 13.19; Fathers of the Church series; 27:234, 245). Describes the position of his opponents as follows: “as long as you only believe in Christ and receive His sacrament of baptism, you will be saved even if you do not reform from that most evil life of yours.” (16.29; Fathers of the Church series; 27:258) Says it is a “false security, if, under the illusion that faith alone is sufficient for salvation, they neglect to live a good life and fail by good works to persevere in the way that leads to God” (14.21; Fathers of the Church series; 27:246)

*Appendix: Selections from the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*

**From the Sixth Session: Decree on Justification**

*Chapter 1:* ... It is necessary that each one recognize and confess, that, whereas all men had lost their innocence in the prevarication of Adam,—having become unclean, and, as the apostle says, “by nature children of wrath” [Eph. 2:3], as (this Synod) has set forth in the decree on original sin,—they were so far “the servants of sin” [Rom. 6:17, 20], and under the power of the devil and of death, that not the Gentiles only by the force of nature, but not even the Jews by the very letter of the law of Moses, were able to be liberated, or to arise, therefrom; although free-will, attenuated as it was in its powers, and bent down, was by no means extinguished in them.

*Chapter 5:* ... The beginning of ... Justification is to be derived from the prevenient grace of God, through Jesus Christ, that is to say, from his vocation, whereby, without any merits existing on their parts, they are called; that so they, who by sins were alienated from God, may be disposed through his quickening and assisting grace, to convert themselves to their own justification, by freely assenting to and co-operating with that said grace: in such sort that, while God touches the heart of man by the illumination of the Holy Ghost, neither is man himself utterly inactive while he receives that inspiration, forasmuch as he is also able to reject it; yet is he not able, by his own free will, without the grace of God, to move himself unto justice in his sight. ...

*Chapter 7:* ... Justification itself ... is not remission of sins merely, but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man, through the voluntary reception of the grace, and of the gifts, whereby man of unjust becomes just. ...

*Chapter 10:* ... They, through the observance of the commandments of God and of the Church, faith co-operating with good works, increase in that justice which they have received through the grace of Christ, and are still further justified. ...

*Chapter 16:* ... For that justice which is called ours, because that we are justified from its being inherent in us, that same is (the justice) of God, because that it is infused into us of God, through the merit of Christ. ...

*Canon 24:* If any one saith, that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works; but that the said works are merely the fruits and signs of Justification obtained, but not a cause of the increase thereof: let him be anathema.

*Canon 30:* If any one saith, that, after the grace of Justification has been received, to every penitent sinner the guilt is remitted, and the debt of eternal punishment is blotted out in such wise that there remains not any debt of temporal punishment to be discharged either in this world, in the next in Purgatory, before the entrance to the kingdom of heaven can be opened [to him]: let him be anathema.

*Canon 32:* If any one saith, that the good works of one that is justified are in such manner the gifts of God, that they are not also the good merits of him that is justified; or, that the said justified, by the good works which he performs through the grace of God and the merit of Jesus Christ, whose living member he is, does not truly merit increase of grace, eternal life, and the attainment of that eternal life ... : let him be anathema.

[Text from Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1919), 2:88-118 *passim*.]