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宗教改革辩论的核心是唯独因信称义。然而关于「唯独信心」讨论的重点则聚焦在第一个词上：唯独。我们都知道，改教家们教导称义是唯独因着信心，而罗马天主教则认为称义是因着信心加上善行。看起来两边似乎都肯定了信心的重要性，唯一不同的地方是要不要加上其他什么来确保称义。双方都肯定信心的必要性，这的确没错，但是这种说法也很容易误导人。因为改教家们与罗马天主教不仅在称义是否唯独信心的问题上无法达成一致，更重要的是他们对信心的本质和定义是完全不同的。换句话说，宗教改革与罗马发生分歧，不仅在于肯定只有信心才使人称义，更在于定义这种信心的到底是怎样的信心。

这种讨论不仅仅是出于对历史的好奇。今天的基督徒肯定唯独因信称义时，必须准确谨慎地清楚他们所说的信心到底是什么。如果我们要如此强调信心，就必须明白什么是信心。而且，使人称义的信心到底有什么特点，这个问题还依旧有许多不同看法。尽管罗马天主教内部对于信心的教导也发展到与宗教改革的理解相似的程度，然而双方仍然有根本性的区别。此外，最近在基督教圈子内有对称义的教义也出现许多争议，有些学者对称义的理解有别于传统的宗教改革立场。这篇文章里，我们要一起检验有关信心的不同观点。

信心的不同定义

罗马天主教的传统更偏向于强调信心是一种智力上的活动，也就是一种认知方式（knowing）。天主教神学常常把信心和理性（reason）作以区分。理性被解释成为一种不靠超自然启示，而只靠头脑本身能力的认知方式。通过理性，人可以获得真正的知识，关于这个世界上许多事物，甚至关于上帝。然而，按照传统的天主教观点，有些事无法通过理性明白。因此，通过信心，人能够获得那些藉着上帝启示，而非自然之光才能得到的知识。这种知识建立在上帝的权柄上，上帝在圣经里说话，上帝特别在教会里说话。信心传达的知识有一些也可以通过理性明白，但是许多是超越理性能力的。一些近代的天主教神学在第二次天特会议的方针下，尝试扩展这种把信心当作认知方式的理解，但是对思维活动的强调仍旧不变。

因此，对于天主教来说，作为一种认知方式，信心对称义来说是必要但不充分的条件。信心还需要加上仁爱，或者叫爱德。赋予仁爱的信心才能使人称义，而缺乏仁爱的信心是死的信心则不能使人称义。这个死的信心之所以不能叫人称义，并不是因为信心本身有什么问题，而是因为缺少了另一个至关重要的伴随元素仁爱。我们稍后会在回来讨论这个问题。

在这样的神学背景下，改教家们认为不但有必要坚持唯独信心使人称义，还必须按照圣经的教导来重新定义这个使人称义的信心。他们并没有否认真信心里有智力的方面。信心的确含有知识。但是他们相信，信心的内容要更丰富。并且信心更偏向于内心的活动。他们常用三个拉丁词来形容这个更加丰富的信心：知识（notitia），赞同（assensus），信靠（fiducia）。知识（notitia）所指的是对基督和祂的福音理性上的认知与理解。赞同（assensus）所指的是理性上认同福音里宣告的真理。这些理智上的活动至关重要，但是超越这些理性活动的乃是信靠（fiducia）。信靠不是理性的活动，而是意志的活动，可以简单地描述为信任（trust）。远远不止是一种认知方式，信心还包括真心实意地信靠基督和祂救赎的福音。

威敏斯特小要理问答第86问简要地表述了宗教改革的观点。信服耶稣基督是什么（即对耶稣基督的信心是什么），回答：「信服耶稣基督是神所赐的救恩，使我们照着福音的信息与劝勉接纳基督，唯独靠他得救。」这里提到，我们不仅要在理性上理解基督和福音的事，还要在心里依靠他作为完美的救主，救我们脱离罪。针对这种信靠的特点，一些神学家称信心是「外省」（extraspective）。我们都很熟悉「内省」（introspective）这个词，内省就是指自我反省，看自己里面。那么外省的意思就是指看自己以外。这恰恰就是信心的工作：信心叫我们把目光转向自己以外（继而抛弃全部的自信），依靠另一位，主耶稣基督，是祂完成了一切，成就了我们的救恩。

明白信心所包含的丰富内容，就容易理解天主教和宗教改革之间的区别了。罗马天主教认为信心是一种认知方式，自然就把信心和理性并列对照起来。因为天主教认为信心和理性是两种认知方式。与此相反，宗教改革更倾向于把信心与行为对照起来。因为信心的重点不在于知识，而是外向的信靠（extraspective trust）。最重要的是，要区别信心与赚得救恩而做的善行。从这一点来看，信心不是一种与理性不同的认知方式，而是与善行不同的获取永生的途径。善行试图用自我的努力在上帝面前赚得永生，而信心则是丢弃一切自我的功德，完全依靠那位为我们赚得永生的基督。这就是称义必须唯独因着信心的原因。因为如果称义要求信心加上任何其他我们自己的善行，那么信心就不再是那个完全抛弃自己、完全依靠基督的真信心。

这也解释了对死的信心不同的定义。我们之前提过，罗马天主教认为，死的信心是指没有仁爱的信心，但是并非信心本身有问题。而宗教改革的观点则是，信心仅停留在知识的层面上，没有进一步的信靠时，是死的。这一点非常重要。改教家们认为死的信心意味着信心本身有缺陷。死的信心不是简单指缺乏爱或者其他美德的信心。死的信心本身根本不是真信心。如果没有外向的信靠，如果不单单依靠基督的话，「信心」只不过是知道一些事实罢了，这种信心根本无法使人称义。

我们要来看看另一种有别于宗教改革的观点。这个观点开始在一些被称作保罗新观（New Perspective on Paul）和盟约异象（Federal Vision）的圈子里流行起来，他们尝试把信心理解为包括更广义的忠心（faithfulness）。在这个观点里，信心不仅是信靠基督，还包括保持忠心所必需有的顺服善行。当然，宗教改革并没有否认善行的重要性，改教家们坚持认为作为信心的果子，善行必然会从信心中产生，但是必须清楚地区分两者。但是今天这种新的观点试图把信靠基督和约中的顺服都放到信心（或忠心）的概念里，称这种更广的信心才是叫人称义的信心。

圣经对信心本质的教导

在圣经各个地方都能看到信心的概念是外向信靠基督。我们必须注意，圣经提到信心时，并不一直指同一个意思。有时圣经提到信心时，是指普遍意义上相信上帝话语（有时被称作普遍信心）。例如，使徒行传二十四章14节里，保罗说：「一切律法和先知所记的，我都相信」（新译本）。这里希腊原文pistis，被翻译成「信心」（faith），也可以被翻译成「忠心」（faithfulness）。所以我们能够找到圣经里这样使用「信心」pistis的例子（例如太二十三23）。但是我们必须明白，当教导救恩，特别是称义的时候，圣经都一致地使用信心来表达外向的信靠基督。这正是神学上所说的使人称义得救的信心。

第一点我要强调的，也许你会感到意外，因为这一点实在是太明显了。圣经不断强调真信心就是对基督的信心。虽然这一点对每一个读圣经的基督徒来说都非常的明显，但是我们不应该一带而过。我们常常听到不信的人在焦虑或身陷危机时会说「要有信心」。可是，对谁有信心？合乎圣经的，使人称义的信心并不是某种一般的美德，使人在未知环境中能保持一种积极的态度。圣经里所说的信心是非常具体的信靠，或者更准确的说是信靠某个人。称义的信心的确相信律法和先知所记的一切话，就像保罗自己所说的，但是更重要的是称义的信心使人完全依靠基督，在基督里安息，信靠福音里的应许。一切信祂的，不至灭亡，反得永生（约三16）；凡信祂的人，必因祂的名，得蒙赦罪（徒十43）；上帝的义，因着信耶稣基督加给一切相信的人（罗三22）。

在圣经里，这个以基督为中心、以福音为中心的信心是完全信靠的信心，是面对各样属世理性的质疑，依旧信靠的信心。使徒保罗的罗马书和加拉太书是两卷专门讲称义的书信。在这两卷书信里，他都引用了哈巴谷书二章4节来陈述信心的教义：「义人必因信得生」。哈巴谷书这一节里的希伯来原文并不一定要翻译成「信靠」，其实这个词常常指其他意思。但是结合上下文，先知在这里所表达的非常清楚，也解释了为什么保罗认为这节经文非常清楚的体现了他所传讲的福音。迦勒底人高傲（哈一8），粗鲁（10），自高自大（二4），以自己为神（一11）。而上帝则呼召祂的百姓因信得生。上帝没有叫他们自给自足，自顾自己，而是要他们在自己以外找寻信心，甚至当无花果树、葡萄树、橄榄树、田野都不出产的时候，甚至在圈中没有牛羊的时候，也坚定不移（三17）。从属世的角度上讲，以色列民没有任何理由有信心，但是耶和华是他们的力量（三19）。这就是信心，面对现实生活所有的困难，依旧全然信靠。

因此，保罗借用哈巴谷对信心简要的表述，在罗马书和加拉太书里做了精彩的总结。我们可以看到，在罗马书第四章结尾处，保罗描述了称义的信心。这段描述在整个因信称义的大讨论中，美妙地对应了数世纪之前哈巴谷曾颂赞的信心。罗马书四章18-21节，保罗论到亚伯拉罕：

「他在无可指望的时候，因信仍有指望，就得以作多国的父，正如先前所说：『你的后裔将要如此。』他将近百岁的时候，虽然想到自己的身体如同已死，撒拉的生育已经断绝，他的信心还是不软弱；并且仰望上帝的应许，总没有因不信，心里起疑惑，反倒因信，心里得坚固，将荣耀归给上帝。且满心相信上帝所应许的必能作成。」

像哈巴谷时代的以色列民一样，亚伯拉罕并没有任何现实的理由对未来抱有信心。他已经差不多快一百岁，他的妻子已经绝育，医学上怀孕的几率是零。但是亚伯拉罕并没有依靠自己的努力，也没有没仰赖现实的几率，而是信靠上帝和祂的应许。这就是信心，外向的信靠。亚伯拉罕没有被不信打倒（信心的敌人），反倒全然相信上帝所应许的必能做到。他无法靠自己做到的，上帝必为他做到。这就是称义的信心，保罗就在下一节说：「所以这就算为他的义」。

我们需要注意，作为外向的信靠，信心不同于所有其他的义行。信心不同于爱、喜乐、忍耐、良善以及其他所有合乎圣经的美德。信心是外向的，是依靠、接受自己之外的人所做的工作。只有信心能做到这一点。这也是圣经特别持续地强调信心和行为之间强烈的对比。行为是满足上帝的律法，并通过自己功德来赚得永生。信心是信靠另一位来满足上帝的律法，并替我们赚得永生。这是两种完全不同的称义方式。在罗马书第四章前面，保罗简明扼要地指出这种差异。他在第4节说，「作工的得工价，不算恩典，乃是该得的」。然而，第5节他继续说道，「惟有不作工的，只信称罪人为义的上帝，他的信就算为义」。正是这节提到上帝不按行为把义归算给罪人，接下来罗马书五章16-19节解释到藉着信心得到的义是白白的恩典，其中包括了基督的义和顺服。因此，这里又是信心的定义：不是靠行为或顺服律法来赚得一份奖赏，而是信靠另一位，并从他领受那份罪人永远无法靠自己达到的顺服。

很惊人的是，保罗明确地对比信心与行为，或者信心与律法，至少不下十几次。在加拉太书三章11-12节里，保罗用哈巴谷二章4节的经文来对比二者，他写道：「没有一个人靠着律法在上帝面前称义，这是明显的，因为经上记着：『义人必因信得生。』」保罗把称义的信心区别于律法的要求，区别于一个人靠自己赚得称义所必需做的一切事。这一点是极其明显的：律法与信心无关！罪人得以称义的途径是唯独信心，唯独哈巴谷先知所讲的外向信靠，绝不是顺服律法。另一个众所周知的例子，就是保罗所说的：「你们得救是本乎恩，也因着信；这并不是出于自己，乃是上帝所赐的；也不是出于行为，免得有人自夸」（弗二8-9）。

信心就是信靠。信心不是善行。信心与所有善行形成鲜明的对比。信心是依靠、接受另一位的善行。因此，与当代的一些学者宣称的相反，信心不是忠心。忠心与其他的善行一样，当我们被圣灵圣化时，这些善行会从信心里生出。但是，对于称义，即上帝宣告我们在祂面前是义的，我们只能在信心和行为中二选一。因此，只有单单靠信心，罪人才能得以称义。

靠信心，因此是靠恩典

最后一点会帮助我们正确看待信心的本质。我们已经考虑过信心的本质是外向的信靠基督，也许会让你惊讶，作为我们称义的唯一途径，我们需要怎样正当的信心。信心并不是上帝随意强加在称义上的条件，好像上帝可以随便把称义的条件换成良善或者忍耐等其他的美德。不，上帝宣告称义只能通过信心达到，因为信心是唯一的选择。因为信心是脱离自我，依靠另外一位。信心与恩典的救赎相符，这救赎不是靠我们自己达到的。

保罗在罗马书四章16节说的很清楚：「所以，成为后嗣是因着信，为的是要按着上帝的恩典，使给所有后裔的应许坚定不移，不但临到那属于律法的人，也临到那效法亚伯拉罕而信的人。亚伯拉罕在上帝面前作我们众人的父」（新译本）。保罗解释道，正因为这称义是因着信，所以才是按着恩典而定的应许。如果人可以通过顺服律法而称义，那这种救赎里怎么可能还有恩典的成分呢？保罗警戒说：「你们这要靠律法称义的，是与基督隔绝，从恩典中坠落了」（加五4）。

总结

从宗教改革到今天，有关称义的争论一直围绕着如何理解唯独信心。称义是唯独因信，但是这里的信心不是随便定义的。使人称义的信心，不同于任何其他的美德，并且不顾世上任何挫折，脱离自我，把信心投靠在耶稣基督得胜的工作上，接受算给我们的恩赐，即基督完美的义。罪人得以在上帝面前被称为义唯独藉着这样的信心，不靠仁爱，不靠忠心，也不靠任何其他高尚的行为。这就是福音：丢弃你一切对自我的信心，完全投靠基督。

http://www.reformedbeginner.net/the-nature-of-faith/

https://zh-hk.facebook.com/reformedbeginner/posts/1333065386714113/

The Nature of Justifying Faith

Resident Faculty, David M. VanDrunen | August 1, 2011 | Type: Articles

The claim that justification comes sola fide was central to the debates of the Reformation. When the matter of sola fide is raised, however, attention tends to focus on the first of these words: alone. We remember that the reformers taught that justification is by faith alone while Roman Catholics countered that justification is by faith and good works. Thus, it may seem, both sides affirmed the importance of faith, but disagreed simply on whether anything had to be added to faith in order to secure justification. This is true in a sense-both sides did speak of the necessity of faith-but it can also be misleading. It is potentially misleading because the reformers and Roman Catholics disagreed about more than whether justification was by faith alone. They also had different understandings of the nature and definition of faith. In other words, the Reformation diverged from Rome not only in affirming that faith alone justifies but also in defining the faith that justifies in the way that it did.

This dispute is much more than an historical curiosity. Christians today who continue to affirm that faith alone justifies surely must take care to speak about this faith accurately. If we are to make such lofty claims for faith we ought to be sure to understand what it is. And disagreements about the character of justifying faith remain alive. Despite some development in Roman Catholic teaching on faith that may seem to bring it closer to the Reformation's understanding, fundamental differences still remain between them. In addition, in some contemporary controversies over the doctrine of justification in Protestant circles, certain writers have suggested an understanding of faith that also diverges from historic Reformation teaching. In this article, then, we will examine these different conceptions of faith and reflect upon the biblical teaching.

DIFFERENT DEFINITIONS OF FAITH

The Roman Catholic tradition tends to emphasize faith as an intellectual act, that is, as a way of knowing. Often Roman Catholic theology distinguishes faith from reason. Reason is taken as a way of knowing that depends not upon supernatural revelation but upon what the human mind can know by its own intrinsic powers. Through reason, a person can gain true knowledge of many things about this world and even about God. Some things cannot be known by reason, however, according to traditional Roman teaching. By faith, then, a person comes to know things not by virtue of the natural light of reason but by divine revelation. Such knowledge rests upon the authority of God alone as he speaks in the Scriptures and especially in the church. Faith informs people of some things that can also be known by reason, but also of many things that are beyond the competence of reason. Some recent Roman Catholic theology, under the direction of the Second Vatican Council, has attempted to broaden this understanding of faith as a mode of knowledge, but this intellectual emphasis still remains.

For Rome, then, this faith as a mode of knowledge was deemed necessary, but insufficient, for justification. To faith must be added charity, or love. Faith that is "informed" by charity justifies while faith that lacks charity-a dead faith-cannot justify. This dead faith fails to justify not because there is something wrong with this faith in itself, but because the essential accompanying element of charity is absent. We will return momentarily to explore the significance of this fact.

In the light of this theological background, the reformers felt it was necessary not merely to insist that faith alone justifies but also to offer a different definition of justifying faith that better captures biblical teaching. They did not deny that there was an intellectual aspect of true faith. Faith certainly involves knowledge. But they were also convinced that faith is something more than this and, in fact, that this something more stands at the heart of what faith is. Three Latin terms often used to describe this enriched conception of justifying faith are notitia, assensus, and fiducia. Notitia refers to an intellectual understanding about Christ and his gospel. Assensus refers to an intellectual assent to the truth of what is proclaimed in the gospel. But beyond these crucial intellectual acts is fiducia, an act not of the intellect but of the will, which may be described simply as trust. Much more than being a mode of knowledge, faith involves a sincere trust in Christ and his gospel for salvation.

Question and Answer 86 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism provides a concise and helpful statement of this insight. In response to the question of what faith in Jesus Christ is, the catechism answers: "Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel." Not only must the mind grasp the things about Christ and his gospel, but also the heart must rest upon him as the perfect Savior from sins. This character of justifying faith as trust in Christ has prompted some theologians to speak of faith as "extraspective." The term introspective is familiar to most people: it refers to looking within oneself. Something that is extraspective, then, concerns looking outside oneself. That is precisely what faith as trust does: it looks outside of oneself (thereby forsaking all self-confidence) and rests upon another, the Lord Jesus Christ, who has done all things necessary for our salvation.

In light of this enriched understanding of faith, some important differences between Rome and the Reformation become entirely understandable. Because Rome tended to understand faith as a mode of knowledge, it naturally juxtaposed faith with reason. For Rome, faith and reason are two ways of knowing. In contrast, Protestant theology has much more commonly juxtaposed faith with works. Because the heart of faith is not knowledge but extraspective trust, faith is most importantly to be distinguished from those good works that one might perform in order to merit salvation. From this perspective, faith is not a way of knowing to be distinguished from reason, but a means for attaining eternal life to be distinguished from good works. Whereas good works seek a self-achieved eternal life before God, faith forsakes all self-achievement and rests entirely upon Christ, who has achieved eternal life for us. This is why, for justification, faith must be alone. If justification required faith to be supplemented by any good works of our own then faith would no longer be what it is, a forsaking of confidence in one's good works and complete confidence in the work of Christ.

This also helps to explain the different understandings of what a dead faith is. For Rome, as previously noted, faith is dead when it is not formed by charity, but this does not necessarily mean that there is something wrong with the faith itself. For the Reformation understanding of faith, on the other hand, faith is dead when it merely knows but does not trust. This is an important difference. The reformers recognized that dead faith entails a defect in faith itself. Dead faith is not simply faith that lacks love or some other accompanying virtue, but a "faith" that is itself not at all true faith. Without that extraspective trust that rests upon Christ alone, "faith" that merely knows facts is unable to justify.

Before we turn to reflect upon biblical teaching about the nature of faith, it may be helpful to note another view of faith that has become popular among some people recently and also differs from historic Protestant teaching. This view, which has circulated among some associated with the so-called New Perspective on Paul and the Federal Vision circles, seeks to understand faith as encompassing the broader idea of faithfulness. Faith, in this view, involves not merely trust in Christ but also the range of obedient good works that faithfulness entails. Whereas the Reformation insisted that good works must flow from faith as its fruit, while distinguishing them clearly, this other view sees both trust in Christ and covenant obedience as parts of a broader faith (or faithfulness) that justifies.

BIBLICAL TEACHING ON THE NATURE OF FAITH

The idea that faith entails extraspective trust in Christ can be seen in any number of biblical passages. It is important to remember that when Scripture refers to faith it does not always have exactly the same meaning of faith in mind. For instance, occasionally Scripture speaks of faith in terms of a general belief in the truth of God's Word (sometimes called fides generalis). Paul, for example, says in Acts 24:14: "I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the prophets." Also, the same New Testament Greek word that is translated "faith," pistis, can also mean "faithfulness." And thus we can find examples of Scripture using pistis in this way (e.g., Matt. 23:23). But what is critical to note is that in contexts in which Scripture teaches about salvation in general and justification in particular it consistently uses the term faith to describe the extraspective trust in Christ described above. This is what theology refers to as a saving, justifying faith.

A first point that may strike readers as patently obvious is that Scripture emphasizes again and again that true faith is faith in Christ. But however obvious this may seem to Bible-reading Christians, it is not a truth that should be quickly passed over. It is not uncommon to hear unbelievers in times of anxiety or crisis saying things such as "you gotta have faith." Yes, but faith in what? Biblical, justifying faith is not some general virtue by which someone retains a positive attitude in the face of uncertain circumstances but a very specific trust in something. Or, much better, trust in someone. Justifying faith does indeed believe all things written in the Law and the Prophets, as Paul states of himself in Acts 24, but even more importantly it rests in Christ himself and the promises offered in his gospel. Whosoever "believes in him" will not perish but receive eternal life (John 3:16); everyone "who believes in him" receives forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43); the righteousness of God comes "through faith in Jesus Christ" (Rom. 3:22).

This Christ-centered, gospel-centered faith is, in Scripture, a faith of trust, of confidence in the face of every earthly reason to doubt. Readers familiar with Paul know that Romans and Galatians are his two letters that deal most extensively with justification, and in both of these letters he looks back to Habakkuk 2:4 as a central statement of the doctrine of faith that he teaches: "the righteous will live by faith." The Hebrew word translated "faith" in Habakkuk 2:4 does not necessarily mean trust and, in fact, often means something different from this. But the context in which the prophet makes this statement indicates why Paul saw this verse as expressing his gospel so clearly. In contrast to their Chaldean enemies threatening to engulf them, who are proud (1:8), rude (1:10), puffed up (2:4), and who make their own might their god (1:11), God's people are called to live by faith. Not self-sufficient and self-absorbed, they are to find their confidence outside of themselves-even when the figs, vines, olive trees, and fields fail to yield their produce, even when the flocks and herds are missing from the fold (3:17). Israel had no earthly reason to be confident, yet the Lord was their strength (3:19). Here is faith, an extraspective trust in the face of overwhelming earthly odds against them.

And so Paul finds Habakkuk's brief statement about faith a marvelous summary of his gospel in Romans and Galatians. We may note how Paul describes this faith that justifies toward the end of Romans 4, in the midst of his larger discussion of justification by faith, and see how beautifully it corresponds to the sort of faith that Habakkuk commended many centuries before. In Romans 4:18-21, Paul writes concerning Abraham:

In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

Like the Israelites in Habakkuk's time, Abraham had no earthly reason to be confident about his future. He was almost 100 years old and his wife was barren-their medical odds of conceiving were zero. But Abraham was not looking to his own efforts or to earthly odds, but to God and his promises. This is indeed faith constituted by extraspective trust. Abraham was not deterred by "distrust" (the opposite of faith), but was "fully convinced" that God would do what he promised. What he could not do himself, God would do for him. This is the faith that justifies, as Paul explains in the very next verse: "That is why his faith was counted to him as righteousness."

One matter that is important to note here is that faith, as extraspective trust, is different from every other righteous action that we perform. Unlike love, joy, patience, goodness, and all the other biblical virtues, faith looks outside of itself in order to rest upon and receive the work of another. Nothing else does this. That is why Scripture, and Paul especially, so emphatically and persistently draw such a sharp contrast between faith and works. Working-that is, fulfilling God's law and earning everlasting life by one's own accomplishments-and believing-that is, trusting in another to fulfill God's law and earn everlasting life on our behalf-are two distinctive ways that one might be justified by God. Earlier in Romans 4 Paul crisply spells out this contrast. "Now to the one who works," he writes in verse 4, "his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due." But, he continues in verse 5, "to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness." The very next verse speaks of God imputing righteousness apart from works, and Romans 5:16-19 explains that the righteousness that one receives by faith is a free gift consisting of Christ's righteousness and obedience. Thus, here again is faith: not working or obeying the law so as to earn a reward, but believing in another and receiving from him that obedience that could never be self-attained.

It may be striking to realize just how often Paul makes this explicit contrast between faith and works, or faith and the law-at least a dozen times even by a conservative estimate. In one of these passages, Galatians 3:11-12, Paul uses the very Habakkuk 2:4 passage considered above to make this contrast. He writes: "Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for 'The righteous shall live by faith.' But the law is not of faith, rather 'The one who does them shall live by them.'" That Paul distinguishes justifying faith from the demands of the law, from all of those things that a person would have to obey perfectly in order to earn justification oneself, is eminently clear here: the law is not of faith! Faith alone, Habakkuk's extraspective trust in the face of earthly adversity alone, not obedience to the law, is the means by which justification comes to sinners. Let one more familiar example from Paul suffice: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

Faith is trust. Faith is not one good work among others, but that which stands in sharp distinction from all good works in that it rests upon and receives the good works of another. Therefore, contrary to the claims of some contemporary writers, faith is not faithfulness. Faithfulness, and all other good works, will flow from faith as we are sanctified by the Holy Spirit. But for justification, God's declaration that we are righteous before him, one must make a choice: faith or works. Therefore only by faith alone will a sinner be justified.

BY FAITH, THEREFORE BY GRACE

One final point may help to put this discussion of the nature of faith in perspective. As we have considered the nature of faith as extraspective trust in Christ, perhaps it has struck you how amazingly appropriate faith is as the only means by which we are justified. Faith was not some arbitrary condition for justification that God decided to impose. It is not as though kindness or patience could have substituted just as well for faith had God decided to make one of these the only instrument of justification. No, God declared that justification of sinners would come by faith because faith is exactly the right choice for the job. Because it looks outside of itself and rests upon the work of another, faith is supremely compatible with a salvation that is gracious, that is, not self-achieved.

Paul makes precisely this point in Romans 4:16: "That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring-not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all." Because this is a justification by faith, explains Paul, it is a promise that comes by grace. Is it conceivable that one could be justified by obedience to the law and still, somehow, preserve the gracious character of salvation? Paul denies this very thing: "You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace" (Gal. 5:4).

CONCLUSION

From the Reformation to the present day, the battle for a biblical doctrine of justification has turned upon an understanding of sola fide. Justification comes by faith alone, but this is not just any faith. Justifying faith, unlike any other virtue, and in defiance of every earthly discouragement, turns away from itself, places its confidence in the victorious work of Jesus Christ, and receives his perfect righteousness as an imputed gift. By this faith, and no other-by this faith, and not love, faithfulness, or any other noble deed-the sinner stands justified before God. The gospel message continues to be: forsake all confidence in yourself and trust wholly in Christ.

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