

# Justification – An Eastern Orthodox Perspective

Colleagues,

One of our dear students in the Lutheran School of Theology here in St. Louis—call it LST-STL—is Richard Leigh. By trade a health-care worker, and now in his mid-years infected with the “rabies of theology,” he’s become a theological omnivore. He’s all over the map, not only in the courses he’s consuming, but also in his wide-ranging surveillance of the theological marketplace when he’s not in class. He gleans all sorts of stuff and forwards some of it to me. At a recent LST-STL get-together I told him that I was going to use one of his recent discoveries for this week’s ThTh 139. I asked him how I should introduce him to y’all. Here’s what he said:

*“I like to think of myself as a white blood cell in the Body of Christ, flowing around interstitially, so to speak, picking up all kinds of things; off to school now learning to be a macrophage equipped to communicate with every cell for diagnosis and appropriate response for that body’s continued (improved?) health and well-being.” Sometimes it looks like the Body of Christ has an autoimmune disorder—where the macrophages don’t recognize cells of the same body as such, but as intruders from the outside. A little improved communication cell-to-cell seems in order here, so, that is largely what I’m about.*

*“Or, I could be characterized as a bee ‘accidentally’ cross-pollinating the trees in God’s garden as (s)he searches out the pure nectar of the word.”*

Here's some recent nectar he found recently. I don't know who the original author is.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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*Ed,*

*I thought you might be interested in this Eastern Orthodox treatment of Justification. It is in two parts. This is the first part. The next one is to follow.* Richard

## **PART I**

**Saturday, July 8, 2000**

**Great-Martyr Prokopios of Caesarea in Palestine**

**Readings for the Day: Epistle: Romans 3:26-4:3**

**Gospel: St. Matthew 7:24-8:4**

Apostolic Teaching XVIII

CHRISTIAN FAITH: Romans 3:26-4:3 (include vss. 3:21-25), especially vs. 31, "Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law."

Frederica Mathews-Greene, Orthodox columnist, author, and Khouriya (Presbytera), was once confronted on a talk show with the popular and vague cliché that "all religious beliefs are equally valid, all are fundamentally the same." To this modern, relativist view of "faith," she gave a straightforward and Orthodox Christian response: "Many faiths, not just ours, hold quite specific doctrines, and stand at firm disagreement with each other."

In today's reading, St. Paul reveals precisely why Mathews-Greene objected so bluntly to this modernist platitude that would merge all types of faith into a single, superficial,

religious pluralism. Observe the Apostle's certainty concerning the faith he proclaims: that his faith centers on Jesus (vs. 26), that Orthodox Faith aims to bring those who affirm it into the single, existing, right relationship with God which faith in the Mosaic Law never can achieve (vss. 27,28), and that Christian faith places the Mosaic Law on a new and true foundation (vs. 31).

First, the Apostle teaches a Faith that is "content specific," doctrine that points to the Lord Jesus exclusively as the One Who is worthy of all devotion, worship and commitment (vs. 26). Of course there is more to Orthodox Christianity than "faith in Jesus," than some general belief in the Person of the Lord. The Christian also unequivocally recognizes the universal presence of sin in all men (vs. 23). The ready recognition of the ubiquity of sin further enables Christians to extend faith to Jesus' death as a redemptive act of God's grace, by which the Faithful are freed from sin and death (vs. 24). Also, to assure that the Lord's death not be taken as an isolated event, the Apostle links faith to the redemption which the Lord's death achieved, presenting Christ's Passion as a propitiatory sacrifice achieved by His blood (vs. 25).

The Apostle specifically holds up the redemptive death of the Lord as the Type of all sacrifices for sins provided under the Mosaic Law, these being antitypes through which God, in His forbearance, passed "over the sins that were previously committed" under that Law (vs. 25). St. Paul draws out this specific connection to show that faith in the death of the Lord is faith in the righteousness of God Who justifies "the one who has faith in Jesus" (vs. 26).

Second, Christian faith is reliance upon "the law of faith" for relationship with God (vs. 27). The "law of faith" states that "...a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law"

(vs. 28). Justification is understood as an act which sets right a relationship. The propitiatory sacrifice of Christ has set aright the relationship between mankind and God.

St. Paul repeatedly connects God's justifying action in the Lord Jesus' death to faith in order to emphasize that each Christian must accept the Lord's death as a gift for himself. Observe: to accept the Lord's death does away with trust in one's own good deeds, since God has accomplished our justification. God calls upon all men to respond in faith to Him, to trust Him, to love Him, and to serve Him. Any one may do this, be he Jew or Gentile (vss. 29,30).

In conclusion, St. Paul rejects the idea that "the law of faith" does away with the Law of God. Rather, Christian Faith "establishes the law" (vs. 31). How? As we express our praise and thanksgiving in loving response to God's redemption and justification by delighting to do His law from our hearts. Christian life is the true way to rejoice in what God has done for us in Christ Jesus, and places the Law on its correct faith foundation and not on any trust in our own works. To trust in what God has done turns the Law into a vehicle for loving God and all men.

The way of Thy commandments have I run, when Thou didst enlarge my heart. (Ps. 118:32)

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## **PART II**

**Sunday, July 9, 2000**

**Hieromartyr Pankratios, Bishop of Taormina**

**Readings for the Day: Epistle: Romans 5:1-10 (Tone**

## 2) Gospel: St. Matthew 6:22-33

Apostolic Teaching XIX

JUSTIFICATION: Romans 5:1-10, especially vss. 8, 9, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more, then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him."

We spoke yesterday of the indissoluble bond between God's gracious justification and our urgent need to receive that justification in faith which trusts, loves and serves God. Justification is another way of speaking of God's great work, the great Mystery of our Redemption. The great justifying God has abolished the might of death, bestowing incorruptibility on the dead, and making it possible for us to cry out, "Wherefore, O Lord, Giver of life, glory to Thee!"

Today's reading complements yesterday's reading, for in today's verses St. Paul elaborates on justification, describing in detail what God has achieved. Like a heavenly gemologist, St. Paul takes out his greatest prize and turns it this way and that to reveal one brilliant facet after another. He discloses at least eight wondrous ramifications of God's justifying action in Christ.

1. "...having been justified by faith, we have peace with God..." (vs. 1). By His Cross and Resurrection, Christ ended the need to resist God. The Lord's pronouncement of "Peace" to the disciples bears all the riches that are packed in the Hebrew word "Shalom" (Jn. 20:19,21): healing, restoration, contentedness, well-being, the end of all disturbance and opposition. Being justified, we have peace. Wherefore to the God of Peace let us cry, "Glory to Thee!"
2. We stand in an utterly new relationship with God our Savior and Lord, a new mode of existence. Yes, we even

“have access by faith into this grace in which we stand” (vs. 2). Let us understand! In the core of our being, we are not in disgrace but in grace, not unforgiven but forgiven, not lost but found, not at enmity but at peace with God. He has justified, and we have access to His grace so that we can be forgiven, healed and made alive. Praise Thy God, O Zion!

3. Standing in this new relationship, let us “rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (vs. 2). By justifying us, God establishes the possibility that we may draw upon His grace: “Though I should walk in the midst of affliction, Thou shalt quicken me; against the wrath of mine enemies hast Thou stretched forth Thy hands, and Thy right hand hath saved me” (Ps. 137:7 LXX). Yes, we may “glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance, character, and character, hope” (vss. 3,4), and our “hope does not disappoint” (vs. 5)!
4. Let us look into the depths of our heart. What do we see? Cease looking only at the fear, the failure, the sin, and recrimination. You are justified. “...the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (vs. 5). O Thou Lover of mankind, glory to Thee!
5. More wondrous yet, the life-giving Spirit does not stand outside and say, “I love you.” We are sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit “in” our hearts. The earnest of the pure and undefiled Spirit dwells within us. O heavenly King, take up Thine abode in us, cleanse us, and save us!
6. “...having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him” (vs. 9). “So let sinners perish from before the face of God but let the righteous rejoice.” O Lord Who has justified us, save us from all tribulation, wrath, danger and necessity!
7. Do you now understand that to be justified means: “we were

reconciled to God through the death of His Son" (vs. 10)?  
The Lord Jesus' death is peace, rejoicing, hope, the love of God, the gift of the Spirit, salvation from wrath. With all that I am, O Lord, I cry, glory to Thee!

8. Justified, "we shall be saved by His life" (vs. 10).  
Eternal life is extended to us. O Christ, Thou hast verily made us a true promise, that Thou shalt be with us to the end of time; a promise to which we believers hold, an anchor for our hopes, as we sing rejoicing.

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