

A QUESTION IN RE JUSTIFICATION.

Rhode Island.

DEAR BROTHER RUSSELL: – There is some difference of opinion amongst the friends here respecting a point of Scripture teaching, and we request your aid in its solution at your earliest convenience and, if you think proper, in the columns of the WATCH TOWER. Briefly stated, it is this: – What is the faith taught in God's Word, by which the sinner is *justified* in God's sight?

With Christian love, Yours in our Lord,

G. W. A_____. and J. B_____.

IN REPLY: – It is faith in "the redemption which is in Christ Jesus," that justifies the sinner. But this implies much more than appears on the surface – much more than many suppose. It implies: –

(1) That the sinner recognizes his own condition of imperfection, sin, separation from God, and his sentence, even if he does not understand fully and correctly what the penalty for sin is – death, destruction. It implies this, because to admit that God has provided a redemption implies that there was need for redemption on the part of the sinner, and that a condemnation rested upon the sinner justly, because of sin.

(2) Faith in this redemption implies that the sinner discerns at least something of the sinfulness of sin; and that he desires to escape, not only from the extreme penalty of sin (death, destruction), but also from the other features; *viz.*, his own imperfections and his alienation from the divine mind. Such a faith, therefore, implies repentance – a desire to return unto God and to righteousness. It means, therefore, dissatisfaction with sin, and a longing desire for righteousness, which is willing, yea, glad, to avail itself of the divine provision in Christ.

This faith, therefore, implies not only a desire for the forgiveness of "the sins that are past through the forbearance of God," but also a desire to live godly, righteously, soberly, and to henceforth avoid all sin, so far as possible.

(3) This faith is said to *justify* us in the divine sight: that is, God, through the merit of the great sacrifice, can be just in recognizing those who, altho still blemished by sin, and unworthy actually of his notice, have thus, by his appointed way, through the merit of the redemption, come back to a condition of mind, of heart, which he can thoroughly approve.

(4) It is called justification by *faith*, because it is not an actual justification. An actual justification would mean that the sinner was made absolutely perfect or correct, but a justification by faith signifies that, altho actually imperfect, still he is now accepted of the Lord, and treated by him as tho he were perfect, because his heart or intentions are now perfect, and the sacrifice for sins, in which by faith he has shared, is reckoned as covering all his past shortcomings.

(5) This new condition of justification, having been entered upon, implies, therefore, as we have seen, a determination upon the part of the justified one to live in thought, word and deed righteously, to the extent of his ability. At first this may seem to him to be a comparatively easy thing – simply to do right, and to avoid doing wrong. But whoever tries to do this will shortly find that it is no easy task, that the weaknesses and tendencies of his own fallen nature, and similar weaknesses in those with whom he daily and hourly comes in contact, have a tendency to oppose his resolves for a life of righteousness, justice, equity, toward God and men. He finds the necessities of life and the conditions of the world, socially and financially, to be a strong current, to be against which would imply much more than he had at first thought. As he looks the question squarely and honestly in the face, he finds that neither his own flesh, nor the world in general, are friends to grace to help him on to God,

and that the only thing to do is either to join with the majority in unfaithfulness to the highest sense of righteousness, truth and love, or else to reckon himself dead to the world – a living sacrifice to God and his righteousness.

(6) This is a turning-point in the pathway of all the justified during the Gospel age. There is no escaping it. They must either go onward to a full consecration to the Lord (Rom. 12:1), or they must retrograde from the standard of righteousness, and be content to avoid the grosser sins, and to live on the common plane of nominal Church worldliness. This the majority seem to do. So far as we may be able to judge, they, in thus compromising themselves, lose their position of justification, which was reckoned to them at the [R2384 : page 321] time of their earliest faith and resolves to follow righteousness, justice and truth. Their justification remained so long as they were conscientiously doing this. Their justification would seem to lapse from the moment that, coming to the place where they realized that obedience to righteousness in this present time would mean self-sacrifice, they turned back and followed no further in the footsteps of him who has set us an example that we should walk in his steps.

(7) Some, yea many, stop when they reach the point of decision: unwilling to compromise righteousness, and yet unwilling to bear the reproaches and losses or sacrifices demanded by a life of full consecration. These show that they have the *spirit* of the truth, tho not in overcoming measure, – not in the measure of *sacrificers*, "priests." These the Lord bears with patiently for a time, peradventure under his disciplines and the instructions of his Word they may see their privileges and learn that the things they would sacrifice are but loss and dross as compared with the glory, honor and immortality they would gain. If these do not learn the lesson and make the sacrifice they will ultimately be *forced* by divine providences to the point of decision [R2384 : page 322] with its reward of everlasting life or its punishment of everlasting death.

But such as need to be *forced* are not to be counted amongst the overcomers, the "elect," the "little flock," who will sit in the throne with the Lord. No, they are represented in the undetermined number who will come up to spiritual conditions through great tribulation. – See Rev. 7:9-17.

If we have not fully answered your question, it is because we have failed to get at its point, and if so, please state it again.
