

**THE OPEN DOOR OF  
JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH:  
A PLEA FOR THE TRUTH**

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The Open Door of Justification by Faith: A Plea for the Truth by William Sanford Hilles

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## AN APPEAL FOR THE TRUTH.

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The publication, by direction of the Yearly Meeting of Friends held in Philadelphia in this year, (1870), of an Epistle to its members regarding Christian doctrine, seems to require from those members of that body who dissent from its statements, a plain exposition of their views. We enter upon this with no purpose of exciting controversy, but with the single object of bearing our testimony to the Truth, in the love of it.

The Epistle in an early paragraph states that

“ It has been held by many of other religious denominations, and the doctrine, we believe, is now advocated by some members of our religious Society, that Christ having perfected the work of reconciliation and redemption for man, by His sufferings and death, therefore a mere belief and trust in Him as a Saviour, in His atonement for sin, and His mediation, are all that are necessary to effect conversion and forgiveness, and ensure justification ; his righteousness being imputed to those thus believing and trusting. Thus men are taught to believe, if

they are only willing to make confession of their lost state, to accept the mercy of God in Christ Jesus as set forth in the holy Scriptures, and apply it themselves to their own condition, they are safe ; they may rest assured that their sins are forgiven them ; that they are justified by the imputed righteousness of Christ, and their salvation is secured."

The principal object of the Epistle appears to be

"to testify against this delusive and dangerous opinion, and, in that love which seeks the salvation of all, to warn our members against adopting it ;" and this for the reason that it would follow from it

"that men, at any time and in their own will, may come to Christ, and adopting the belief that He has suffered in their stead, and paid the penalty of their sins, they may rest on Him as their substitute ; place their hopes of salvation on His atoning sacrifice, and be accepted in Him ; though they may never have experienced thorough repentance for their sins, nor the washing of regeneration through\* the renewing of the Holy Ghost."

Now this inferential result is such as no honest religious inquirer could accept ; and hence, if it be correctly stated, it serves to

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\* Not "through" but "and" in the original.

condemn the doctrine set forth in the preceding sentence, as unworthy of reception.

But a sweeping statement of this kind should be susceptible of proof by two methods; by the authority of the Holy Scriptures, and by the ascertained results. If these be found to support it, let it be cheerfully accepted and adopted. But if the whole tenor of the instructions given by our Lord and His apostles be against such a conclusion; and if, further, this inference is not borne out by the effects which are found to be produced upon the hearts and characters of believers; if it be condemned by the united voice of the apostles and teachers of Christian doctrine in the Bible, and by the united experience of all, in all time, who have in simplicity trusted themselves and their interests to the atoning mercy of God in Christ Jesus, and whose lives have borne evidence to the reality of the change wrought in them by faith in the blood of Christ,—then it must take its place as a misconception and misstatement regarding the principles of the Covenant of Grace.

Now upon this point, what is the testimony

of the Scriptures? Of a multitude of passages bearing upon it, the following statement of the Apostle Paul is one of the most pregnant: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them:" that is, God's purpose of reconciling the world unto Himself is being accomplished in Christ, and the means or method is, "*not imputing their trespasses unto them.*" There can, of course, be no doubt that the Gospel contains a provision for the forgiveness of the sins of men for Christ's sake; the question is, *When* does this forgiveness or justification take effect, or become availing to relieve the sinner from the guilt of past sin? *When* is this blessedness "reckoned" to him? And the answer may be given, as in Abraham's case, "Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision, and he received the sign of circumcision," (which is the type of holiness,) "a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised." Can anything be more plain than this? Can anything break the force of the assertion in another place, that there is a salvation of which *this* is the day?—an accepted time, and that that time is *now*?



To say that the work of *sanctification* is a gradual or progressive one, as is urged in a subsequent part of the document, is only to bring more force to bear upon the assertion that the *present* and *free* forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, is the offer of the Gospel to every one who will believe and accept it. "Thy faith *hath made thee whole*," is the saying of Christ to the woman who but touched the hem of His garment, and was healed of her long-standing bodily disease. "By grace *are ye saved*, through faith," says the apostle to the Ephesian Christians, who, it is evident from the whole context of the passage, were not left in doubt of the present possession of "all spiritual blessings," including of course the forgiveness of sins.

And while we would earnestly urge the correlative truth that Christians are to be known by their fruits; that that is a vain faith which is without works, and that only is genuine which is proved to be such by a holy life, we yet boldly assert that the full confidence in the mercy and goodness of God in Jesus Christ to which we are invited by the Saviour and His Apostles, the cordial recep-

tion of the great truth that He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, does produce in the human heart precisely those effects which the gracious Author of the Gospel intended it to do. His word does not return unto Him void, but accomplishes the work whereto He sends it. What the law could not do, God in His mercy accomplishes by the mission of Christ, in whose name repentance and remission of sins are offered freely to all who will believe.

There may be, and there has, in fact, often been, in dogmatic theology a separation not warranted by the truth of Scripture, between justification and sanctification, things which God has joined together; and the lives of many *professors* of the Christian name show that they are far from being *possessors* of that living faith which overcomes the world. But what then? Shall the unbelief of men make the faith and promises of God of no effect? Nay, rather let God be true, though every man be unfaithful and false.

Let us understand from these failures among mere professors how needful is the exhortation addressed to the healed and forgiven by the

Saviour, "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." Let us join in the earnest appeal to all believers, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." But we must not therefore gainsay or conceal the fact that it is to the *believers* that these cautions are addressed, and that the hearty reception of the good tidings that Christ came to announce, lies at the outset—not at the end nor in the middle—of the Christian course. To the unbelieving Jews who inquired of Him what work of God they might do which would recommend them, His answer was to direct them to confidence in Himself as the first step to the favor of God. "This is the work of God," said He, "that ye believe in Him whom He hath sent."

The existence of a counterfeit proves, not the *worthlessness*, but the *value* of the true coin; and he is an unworthy disciple of the Saviour who suffers himself to be discouraged, and his faith undermined by the discovery that there are false professors in the Church.

"The pure in heart [and they only] shall see God." "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." The very end and aim of