

Survey about Justification by Grace

Some years ago a survey of some 3,000 young Lutheran people in USA revealed some uncertainty about the chief article of the Christian faith. Many felt that they could win God's favour by being good, rather than through simply receiving it as a gift that God offers them for Jesus' sake. About half of them saw the Gospel as a guide to right behaviour, in other words, as a new Law. The results of the survey shocked many Lutherans. The Lutheran Church has always taught that unless a person believes that he or she is justified by faith he or she will not get to eternal life. There is no more important question than: How can I obtain a favourable verdict from God? Will He declare me righteous? The results for the youth were a percentage of a majority response of a randomly selected group of 80 Pastors of the Missouri Synod in the 1962 study. Here are some of the questions with their responses:

Item	Youth, % 1959	Youth % 1962	Pastor s %	Ans wer
32. All who live a good moral life are Christians	69	77	99	No
46. Although there are many religions in the world each one leads to the same God		60	97	No
48. If I say I believe in God and do right, I will get to heaven.		59	97	No
62. I can hope to be saved, but I cannot be certain that I am saved		40	97	No
63. God is satisfied if a person lives the best life he can		37	98	No
64. If one is tolerant, one must hold that other religions are as right before God as Christianity.	34	45	98	No
65. The main emphasis of the Gospel is on God's rules for noble living.	32	46	98	No
67. A person is forgiven only when he feels right in the heart	27	37	98	No
68. Salvation depends on being sincere in whatever you believe.	23	31	93	No
70. In the Christian life, sanctification comes before justification.	23	19	90	No
71. The holy Christian church is the total membership of all Christian denominations (church bodies)	20	19	93	No
72. The way to be justified before God is to try sincerely to live a good life.	18	24	96	No
73. Faith means feeling right in your heart about God.		18	90	No

Of course, what people say in a survey depends partly on whether they really understand the questions. A survey does not gauge people in the way God, who sees the heart, sees them. However, the answers are revealing, and alarming. The youth of the major Lutheran churches in the USA was included in the survey. We should never take our youth for granted in this important area. The survey demonstrated that even a majority of Lutheran youth either did not understand or did not believe the Christian doctrine of justification through faith. Surveys of other Protestant youth reveal that there is no appreciable difference with regard to the doctrine of justification by faith. The majority reject it and still believe that they can work their own way to heaven.

While the survey reveals that the vast majority of the pastors from the conservative Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod accept the doctrine of justification by faith, the answers supplied by the randomly selected group of Missouri Synod pastors indicate that there was even a small percentage of them who did not accept the central doctrine of justification by faith alone. Four per cent of the 80 Missouri Synod pastors who responded to this survey said that the way to be justified before God is to try sincerely to live a good life.

Basically, there are only two religions in this world. There is the religion of two letters, "do", the religion of the law; and there is the religion of four letters, "done", the religion of the Gospel. The one says you must still do something to reach eternal life, while the other teaches that eternal salvation is entirely a gift of God. All the religions that people have ever invented are religions of the law. Only historic Christianity, the faith clearly taught in the Holy Scriptures, is a religion of the Gospel. Man's way, the religion of the Law, leads to eternal Hell. God's way, the religion of the Gospel, alone leads to eternal salvation. God teaches in His Word that all people are justified by His grace through faith in Jesus, and not by works.

The doctrine of justification by grace through faith is the teaching upon which the Christian church either stands or falls. Unfortunately, there are many who call themselves Christians who still believe they are going to work their own way to heaven. They claim to believe in Christ; but they do not believe that Christ gave His life as a

complete satisfaction for all sin.

A person who believes that he or she is saved only through faith in Christ can know with absolute certainty that he or she will go to heaven at death. Such a person possesses this certainty because he or she places his or her whole confidence in Jesus Christ, and not on efforts to be good. A person who trusts even in the slightest in his or her own deeds to achieve eternal salvation will never be convinced that enough has been done to achieve it. If he or she gives serious thought to the matter, he or she must live in constant uncertainty. Paul wrote, in Romans 3 :21-28: “But now the righteousness of God, apart from the Law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ, and comes to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. They are declared righteous freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. God publicly displayed Him as the atonement cover through faith in His blood. God did this to show His righteousness, because, in His patience, He had left unpunished those sins that had been done in the past. He wanted to show His righteousness at the present time, so that He might be righteous, and the One who declares righteous the person who believes in Jesus. Where, then, is boasting? It has been excluded. On what principle? On the principle of works? No, rather, it is excluded on the principle of faith! For we conclude that a person is declared righteous by faith, apart from the works of the Law.”