

Doctrinal Statement by Arthur Kuschke
at the Trial of Elder John O. Kinnaird
Bethany OPC, Oxford, PA - November 23, 2002

It is charged that in the documents specified, Elder Kinnaird teaches “a doctrine of justification by faith and works”. He does not use the phrase, “justification by faith and works”. He says that believers are justified by faith at their conversion. He also says, “it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous” at the Day of Judgment, “according to what they have done in the body”. To be “declared righteous” is, precisely, to be justified. Thus he affirms justification by faith, and also justification by obedience to the law.

After justification at conversion, why does he speak of justification at the Judgment? He says that the imputed righteousness of Christ, which all Christians receive at conversion, “cannot suffice” to bring us into full conformity to the image of Christ in true and personal holiness (“Theological Statements” pg 7 revised, pg 4 original). Obedience to the law, in this life, is therefore still necessary for eternal life. The justification at conversion, by “the imputed righteousness of Christ”, “cannot suffice” to supply this need; there must still be a justification at the Judgment according to our obedience to the law. This is a doctrine of justification by faith and works.

Here Elder Kinnaird has suggested two reasons why the imputed righteousness of Christ “cannot suffice”. The first is that sanctification is also given us, and that the obedience wrought by sanctification does provide the real and personal righteousness and holiness required; we reply, that even our best sanctification and obedience in this life cannot suffice for this purpose, as will be shown later.

His second reason why the imputed righteousness of Christ “cannot suffice” is that by the very nature of imputation, Christ’s righteousness is the righteousness of another, and therefore cannot be truly and personally our own. He says that real and personal righteousness must be “our own, our very own, not just that of another credited to us” (Justification, Presbyterian OPC internet forum 12-24-2001 pg 2). Here he challenges the imputation of the Righteousness of Christ as not providing us with real and personal righteousness. But if the righteousness of another is truly credited to us, is not that righteousness then ours, really and personally? Is imputation empty? Is it a legal fiction? Christ died for particular persons. By his death he paid our full penalty. And by his righteousness he gained our full righteousness. Justification at conversion is complete justification, not limited justification, and not partial justification.

It is of the very essence of the Scriptural doctrine of justification that as sinners we cannot be redeemed in any other way, by any righteousness of our own, but must have an imputed Righteousness that is not our own, an alien Righteousness, the Righteousness of another, credited to us, if it is to be real and personal and our very own. This Righteousness Christ gives us, by his grace, through faith alone.

In his writings Elder Kinnaird affirms many things that are true. He quotes freely from Scripture and the Westminster Standards. But it is his inability to abandon his

problematic statements that leaves him open to the charge of teaching a doctrine of justification by faith and works.

Elder Kinnaird appeals to sanctification, in support of his distinctive teaching on justification. But the Larger Catechism Questions 77 and 78 clearly set forth pertinent and essential differences between justification and sanctification. Although the two are inseparably joined, they differ: in justification God imputes the Righteousness of Christ, while in sanctification the Spirit infuses grace and enables us to the exercise of that grace. In justification sin is pardoned; in sanctification it is subdued. Justification equally frees all believers from the revenging wrath of God, and that perfectly in this life, that they never fall into condemnation. Sanctification is neither equal in all, nor in this life perfect in any, but growing up to perfection. Following on, Q. 78 continues: The imperfection of sanctification in believers ariseth from the remnants of sin abiding in every part of them, and the perpetual lustings of the flesh against the Spirit, whereby they are often foiled with temptations, and fall into many sins and their best works are imperfect and defiled in the sight of God.

Thus, the Larger Catechism. So sanctification, imperfect in this life, cannot be relied upon to provide a real and personal righteousness which is in full conformity to the image of Christ. And our best efforts are imperfect and defiled in God's sight. The Confession (XVI:5) says that our best works cannot endure the severity of God's judgment. In Justification, however, believers already have complete pardon, and complete righteousness, perfectly in this life, that they never fall into condemnation.

There are passages which seem to say that we can be perfect in this life. In 1 John 3:6 and 9 we are told that whoever abides in Christ does not sin; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. But here the apostle has in mind the dreadful sin of those who finally fall away from the gospel. The sin of which these people are guilty is utter apostasy. And Hebrews 6:14-16 tells us that there are members of the visible church, who were once even enlightened, but who do fall away finally, and it is impossible to renew them to repentance. They have sinned not in certain respects only, but in total renunciation of God's grace. They show that they never were true believers.

But the apostle John plainly says that true believers do sin: If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us; if we say we have not sinned, we make Christ a liar; and if we sin, we have an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the Righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins (1 John 1:8-2:2).

It appears that Elder Kinnaird does not take into account the completeness of justification, nor the sinfulness of that pervasive sin which still dwells within us until our glorification.

But what, then, of obedience? Good works are, undoubtedly, required of believers; our Lord said, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). The Lord requires them of us. His law requires them of us. And here, indeed, we all as sinners find a disturbing question: how can we love him, if we daily break his commandments in thought, word, and deed (Shorter Catechism Q.82)? This tests our assurance; it requires of us ongoing repentance and ongoing faith in Christ, lest we ourselves should be

castaways. Do we rest in Christ and the promises of God's enduring grace?

Good works characterize the Christian. They are evidences of a faith that is alive. This continues to disturb us. We see good works in others. But it is hard for us to suppose that we ourselves really do any good works. There may be signs, that if we trust in Christ ---- and without him we can do nothing ---- that perhaps there may have been something truly good in something we have done; not perfect, but faithful to some gospel truth or Biblical principle. Nevertheless we can never go so far as to count on our own "good works" done in this life for that obedience in accord with which we might be declared righteous at the Judgment. We know that in respect to perfection, and full conformity to the image of Christ, our good works cannot suffice for that declaration. Nor can our evangelical obedience. The Confession (XI:1) says the free justification of those whom God effectually calls "is not for anything wrought in them, or done by them" nor by imputing "any other evangelical obedience to them".

This brings us to the ultimate principles of law and grace. Does the Bible teach salvation for sinners by obedience to the law, or by grace through faith? It is obvious that the Bible plainly says two apparently different things: "This do and thou shalt live" (Luke 10:28) and "whosoever believeth in him will have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Many passages tell us that obedience brings life; many other passages tell us that we are "saved by grace, through faith, not of works lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8). Which is right? Or, are both right?

This is no trivial problem. "A great part of men" says Calvin, "imagine that righteousness is composed of faith and works" (Institutes III, 11,13). This error has always come to expression. It is the error natural to sinful man. The Galatians were deceived by it. The Roman Catholics are imbued with it. But Paul dealt with it decisively, and the Reformers agreed with Paul, and so do the Westminster Standards : righteousness is by faith alone, by grace alone, without any contribution on our part.

The permanence, the unchanging character of God's eternal law clarifies the question of law and grace. The law is always the same. It is the reflection of God's eternal holiness, justice, and truth (Romans 7:12). It always exemplifies righteousness. It always demands righteousness. It finds righteousness in Christ. And it is always the same, whether it is applied to the just, or the unjust. This is the truth which is enunciated in Romans 2:13 ("the doers of the law will be justified"). The criterion of the law is doing, not just hearing and disobedience, and this is always the basic principle, whether for the reprobate or for the elect. The reprobate perish as judged by the law for their sins done in this life; as for the doing of the law, they have not done it. The elect are justified as judged by the same law through their Perfect Substitute, the Just One, Jesus Christ, in whom and with whom they are united by faith. He has done it.

There is a sharp line between the two great groups, the just and the unjust. The just were once part of the unjust whole. God has made the difference by his grace. All would perish, were it not for God's grace to his chosen people. His chosen people are foreknown, predestined, justified, and glorified (Romans 8:28-34).

Justification is a central doctrine of the gospel. It must be clearly stated, clearly defined,

clearly guarded, clearly preached. Many have stumbled at it, but it is clearly revealed in God's Word.

Justification is God's declaration that we are righteous. How can this be? How can God justify the ungodly?

Only because God has imputed to us the righteousness of Christ. On that ground alone he declares what is now the case : we are righteous, for he has given us "the gift of righteousness" (Rom. 5:17). So Justification is the key doctrine that makes the difference between the lost and the redeemed, according to God's eternal law. And Justification is complete and thorough, once for all; it is perfect in this life and forever, so that we can never fall into condemnation. And it is entirely by God's grace, not by any righteousness that we have done. And it is by faith alone without any works of any kind on our part: it must be by faith alone if it is to be by grace alone.

There are other great central doctrines of the faith, and they are necessarily interlocked together in Scripture, to reveal the system of doctrine which Scripture teaches. Such other great central doctrines are, God's law; sin; God's wrath; God's grace; the Person and Work of our Redeemer and Perfect Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ; his Substitutionary death, whereby he paid the penalty for our sins; his resurrection and his resurrection power to save; the Holy Spirit's grace of regeneration; repentance and faith; sanctification; perseverance; glorification after this life; judgment. All are necessarily interlocking truths within the one system. They move together. They are inter-dependent. If one is changed or diminished from its true force, the others are also influenced. As one system they give us the pure gospel, which is the only true gospel.

These truths are linked together not only because it is given to us to understand their inter-relatedness. They are explicitly linked together in Scripture. For example, in Romans 4:16, faith is necessarily tied to grace, and then both faith and grace are necessarily tied to the surety of God's promise. The Greek is very explicit, not employing as many words as our English translations. It focuses on great principles:

For this reason through faith,
in order that by grace,
to the end that the promise might be sure to all the seed.

This inescapable logic demands our attention. Faith, grace and surety not only belong together but they must go together.

Other examples of such explicit linkage are numerous: Romans 3:20, "Therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin". John 3:16. 1 Peter 3:18. 1 John 5:10. Galatians 3:13. 2 Cor. 5:21. Isaiah 53:4-6. Ephesians 2:4. Romans 7:12-17. Romans 8:28-30.

We see the integrity of many other truths involved with the integrity of the doctrine of justification especially. One principle that is repeated, and insisted upon many times, is that "the deeds of the law" are excluded from justification: Acts 13:38-39, Romans 3:20, Romans 3:28, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds

of the law”. Romans 4:5. Romans 4:6. Romans 4:13. Romans 9:30-32. Galatians 2:16. Galatians 3:10. Galatians 3:20. Galatians 3:21-24. Galatians 5:4. Ephesians 2:8-9. Philippians 3:9. 2 Timothy 1:9.

Justification is also linked necessarily to the atonement by the common principle of substitution. In Question 33 of the Shorter Catechism, the pardon spoken of in the first part of the answer (Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins) comes to us only through the substitutionary atonement. We can have no pardon without that substitutionary sacrifice. Likewise the second part of SC Q.33 (and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone) also depends entirely on substitution. There is full substitution in each. Our guilt was imputed to Christ our Substitute; he paid the full penalty of God’s eternal wrath in our place, the Just for the unjust. And his righteousness is imputed to us, an alien righteousness that comes from another, who is our Substitute, even Christ our Righteousness (Jeremiah 33:15-16).

It appears to be a flaw in Elder Kinnaird’s teaching that he fails to relate together the great central doctrines of the Biblical system in the same way that the Scriptures and our Standards relate them. Nor does he identify correctly those doctrines, in the system, that are especially related to justification.

To sum up: Elder Kinnaird has re-defined justification by faith, to limit its fullness, completeness, and efficacious character so that after justification we do not yet have enough righteousness, or even the right kind of righteousness that is required at the Judgment; and he seeks to provide a further “personal” righteousness, expressed in our obedience to the law, for a final declaration of righteousness at the Judgment. He has tried to combine both faith, and the works of the law, for justification. This, Scripture and our Standards forbid.