

UNMASKING A DECEPTION

The Subtle Trap of "Empowered" Works

"There is not one in one hundred who understands for himself the Bible truth on this subject [Justification by Faith] that is so necessary to our present and eternal welfare."

— 1SM 359

I. THE ONE IN ONE HUNDRED

The Startling Statistic

If the "Heart of the Plan of Salvation" is Justification by Faith, and statistics suggest not 1% of 100 believers truly understand it, we face a crisis. **To stand in the Shaking, we must know Christ and appropriate His righteousness alone.**

The Common (But Flawed) Understanding:

- **Step 1:** God forgives my past sins (Grace).
- **Step 2:** God fills me with the Spirit to obey the Law (Grace/Power).
- **The Error:** Believing that Step 1 + Step 2 = Acceptance.
- **The Reality:** If you rely on your "Spirit-empowered obedience" for acceptance, you are still relying on works. God will not accept a mixture of His Grace and your performance.

III. CHRIST IS OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Divine Exchange

We are not justified by observing the law, nor by trying to keep it with God's help. We are justified because Christ is our Righteousness.

The Shift:

- **Old Way:** "I am righteous because God helps me do good things."
- **New Way:** "I am righteous because Jesus is standing before the Father in my place."
- My good days do not make my righteousness better.
- My bad days do not make my righteousness worse.

THE SHAKING TRUTH:

The natural human heart wants to pay for salvation. We want to bring a price. To accept that our "sanctified obedience" is not the basis of our acceptance is the hardest truth to learn. It lays the glory of man in the dust.

The Great Deception:

Most Christians believe they are saved by faith. Yet, many are unknowingly relying on a subtle form of works. They have accepted a "math" of salvation that looks correct on the surface but fails to save.

II. GOD'S DILEMMA

Justice and the Circle of Love

God is Love. He created the universe to operate on laws—gravity, thermodynamics, and moral law. These laws act as a circle; inside is life and peace, outside is chaos and death.

The Problem:

When Adam and Eve ate the fruit, they stepped outside the circle.

• **If God destroys them:** He seems unmerciful. Old Way:

• **If God ignores their sin:** He becomes a liar (because He said "you shall surely die") and an unjust Judge who allows chaos to reign.

The Solution:

God cannot merely "wave a wand" to forgive. Justice requires a response to the broken law. Jesus stepped in to take the consequence of the broken law (Death) and offer us His record of keeping the law (Righteousness).

IV. THE PHARISEE & THE TAX COLLECTOR

The Trap of Gratitude:

In Luke 18, the Pharisee did not brag about his own strength. He said, "God, I thank you..." He gave God the credit for his good works!

- He relied on God's work in him ("I fast, I tithe").
- He looked down on others ("I am not like other men").

The Path of Justification: The Tax Collector had no "empowered works" to point to. He had only a desperate need. "God, have mercy on me a sinner."

DISCUSSION GUIDE

For Small Groups & Personal Reflection

Objective: To move the group from relying on “Spirit-empowered works” to relying solely on the merit of Jesus Christ.

1. ICEBREAKER: THE “GOOD CHRISTIAN” CHECKLIST

Ask: If you were asked to describe a “really good Christian” without using the Bible, what behaviors or traits come to mind? (e.g., doesn’t drink, gives to charity, always calm).

Discuss: Why is it so natural for us to judge spiritual maturity by external behavior?

3. GOD’S DILEMMA

God’s dilemma is profound.

God looks at sin destroying His children. His wrath against sin is actually an act of love for His creation. He must destroy sin to save the universe from chaos. Since He gives us free will, if we cling to sin, we must be destroyed with it. This is an act of love for the universe, but it is a “strange work” for a Creator who loves His children.

Ask: How does this change your view of God’s judgment? Does it help you see His wrath as a necessary part of His love?

5. CLOSING APPLICATION:

The Error: Believing that God’s Grace + My Spirit-led Obedience = Salvation.

The Truth: Christ’s Righteousness (imputed) = Salvation (root). My Obedience = Fruit (not root).

The Danger: Relying on the fruit (Sanctification) instead of the root (Justification).

To summarize: The deception is confusing the fruit for the root. If you rely on the fruit to keep the tree alive, it will die. You must rely on the root.

2. THE “ONE IN ONE HUNDRED” MATH

The Logic Trap: The author presents a “Common Understanding” that turns out to be false: Forgiveness + Spirit-Empowered Obedience = Salvation.

Discussion: Why is this deception so subtle? Why does it feel right to say, “God accepts me because He is helping me be good”?

Key Distinction: Discuss the difference between:

- o **Salvation based on change:** “I am saved because I am changing.” (Works)
- o **Change based on salvation:** “I am changing because I am saved.” (Fruit)

4. THE PHARISEE IN THE MIRROR

Read Luke 18:9–14.

The Twist: The Pharisee wasn’t an atheist; he thanked God! “God, I thank you that I am not like other men.”

Self-Examination: The author suggests that if we identify with the Tax Collector (the good guy in the story), we are actually being the Pharisee (who thought he was the good guy).

Question: In what areas of your life are you tempted to say, “Lord, I thank you that I am not like those people over there”? (e.g., political views, parenting styles, theology).

PRAYER FOCUS

For Unmasking: Ask the Spirit to reveal hidden self-righteousness—where we trust our “good behavior” instead of Jesus.

For the Exchange: Pray to stop earning salvation and fully accept Christ’s perfect record as our own.

For Humility: Pray for the heart of the Tax Collector—looking only at God’s mercy, never comparing ourselves to others.

For Trust: Thank God that His justice and love met at the Cross, solving the dilemma of our sin.

REFLECTION NOTES


