The Doctrine of Justification

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The Doctrine of Justification

Arthur W. Pink

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1. Introduction

Our first thought was to devote an introductory chapter unto a setting

forth the principle errors which have been entertained upon this

subject by different men and parties, but after more deliberation we

decided this would be for little or no profit to the majority of our

readers. While there are times, no doubt, when it becomes the

distasteful duty of God's servants to expose that which is calculated

to deceive and injure His people, yet, as a general rule, the most

effective way of getting rid of darkness is to let in the light. We

desire, then, to pen these articles in the spirit of the godly John

Owen, who, in the introduction to his ponderous treatise on this theme

said, "More weight is to be put on the steady guidance of the mind and

conscience of one believer, really exercised about the foundation of

his peace and acceptance with God, than on the confutation of ten

wrangling disputers... To declare and vindicate the truth unto the

instruction and edification of such as love it in sincerity, to

extricate their minds from those difficulties in this particular

instance, which some endeavor to cast on all Gospel mysteries, to

direct the consciences of them that inquire after abiding peace with

God, and to establish the minds of them that do believe, are the things

I have aimed at."

There was a time, not so long ago, when the blessed truth of

Justification was one of the best known doctrines of the Christian

faith, when it was regularly expounded by the preachers, and when the

rank and file of church-goers were familiar with its leading aspects.

But now, alas, a generation has arisen which is well-nigh totally

ignorant of this precious theme, for with very rare exceptions it is no

longer given a place in the pulpit, nor is scarcely anything written

thereon in the religious magazines of our day; and, in consequence,

comparatively few understand what the term itself connotes, still less

are they clear as to the ground on which God justifies the ungodly.

This places the writer at a considerable disadvantage, for while he

wishes to avoid a superficial treatment of so vital a subject, yet to

go into it deeply, and enter into detail, will make a heavy tax upon

the mentality and patience of the average person. Nevertheless, we

respectfully urge each Christian to make a real effort to gird up the

loins of his mind and seek to prayerfully master these chapters.

That which will make it harder to follow us through the present series

is the fact that we are here treating of the doctrinal side of truth,

rather than the practical; the judicial, rather than the experimental.

Not that doctrine is impracticable; no indeed; far, far from it. "All

Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable (first) for

doctrine, (and then) for reproof, for correction, for instruction in

righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Doctrinal instruction was ever the

foundation from which the Apostles issued precepts to regulate the

walk. Not until the 6th chapter will any exhortation be found in the

Roman Epistle: the first five are devoted entirely to doctrinal

exposition. So again in the Epistle to the Ephesians: not until 4:1 is

the first exhortation given. First the saints are reminded of the

exceeding riches of God's grace, that the love of Christ may constrain

them; and then they are urged to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith

they are called.

While it be true that a real mental effort (as well as a prayerful

heart) is required in order to grasp intelligently some of the finer

distinctions which are essential to a proper apprehension of this

doctrine, yet, let it be pointed out that the truth of justification is

far from being a mere piece of abstract speculation. No, it is a

statement of Divinely revealed fact; it is a statement of fact in which

every member of our race ought to be deeply interested in. Each one of

us has forfeited the favor of God, and each one of us needs to be

restored to His favor. If we are not restored, then the outcome must

inevitably be our utter ruin and hopeless perdition. How fallen

creatures, how guilty rebels, how lost sinners, are restored to the

favor of God, and given a standing before Him inestimably superior to

that occupied by the holy angels, will (D.V.) engage our attention as

we proceed with our subject.

As said Abram Booth in his splendid work "The Reign of Grace" (written

in 1768), "Far from being a merely speculative point, it spreads its

influence through the whole body of divinity (theology), runs through

all Christian experience, and operates in every part of practical

godliness. Such is its grand importance, that a mistake about it has a

malignant efficacy, and is attended with a long train of dangerous

consequences. Nor can this appear strange, when it is considered that

this doctrine of justification is no other than the way of a sinner's

acceptance with God. Being of such peculiar moment, it is inseparably

connected with many other evangelical truths, the harmony and beauty of

which we cannot behold, while this is misunderstood. Till this appears

in its glory, they will be involved in darkness. It is, if anything may

be so called, a fundamental article; and certainly requires our most

serious consideration" (from his chapter on "Justification").

The great importance of the doctrine of justification was sublimely

expressed by the Dutch Puritan, Witsius, when he said, "It tends much

to display the glory of God, whose most exalted perfections shine forth

with an eminent lustre in this matter. It sets forth the infinite

goodness of God, by which He was inclined to procure salvation freely

for lost and miserable man, to the praise of the glory of His grace'

(Eph. 1:6). It displays also the strictest justice, by which He would

not forgive even the smallest offense, but on condition of the

sufficient engagement, or full satisfaction of the Mediator, that He

might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus' (Rom

3:26). It shows further the unsearchable wisdom of the Deity, which

found out a way for the exercise of the most gracious act of mercy,

without injury to His strictest justice and infallible truth, which

threatened death to the sinner: justice demanded that the soul that

sinned should die (Rom. 1:32). Truth had pronounced the curses for not

obeying the Lord (Deut. 28:15-68). Goodness, in the meantime, was

inclined to adjudge life to some sinners, but by no other way than what

became the majesty of the most holy God. Here wisdom interposed,

saying, I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine

own sake, and will not remember thy sins' (Isa. 43:25). Nor shall you,

His justice and His truth have any cause of complaint because full

satisfaction shall be made to you by a mediator. Hence the incredible

philanthropy of the Lord Jesus shineth forth, who, though Lord of all,

was made subject to the law, not to the obedience of it only, but also

to the curse: "hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we

might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Ought not the pious soul, who is deeply engaged in the devout

meditation of these things, to break out into the praises of a

justifying God, and sing with the church, "Who is a God like unto Thee,

that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression" (Micah

7:18). O the purity of that holiness which chose rather to punish the

sins of the elect in His only begotten Son, than suffer them to go

unpunished! O the abyss of His love to the world, for which He spared

not His dearest Son, in order to spare sinners! O the depth of the

riches of unsearchable wisdom, by which He exercises mercy towards the

penitent guilty, without any stain to the honor of the most impartial

Judge! O the treasures of love in Christ, whereby He became a curse for

us, in order to deliver us therefrom! How becoming the justified soul,

who is ready to dissolve in the sense of this love, with full

exultation to sing a new song, a song of mutual return of love to a

justifying God.

So important did the Apostle Paul, under the guidance of the Holy

Spirit, deem this doctrine, that the very first of his epistles in the

New Testament is devoted to a full exposition thereof. The pivot on

which turns the entire contents of the Epistle to the Romans is that

notable expression "the righteousness of God"--than which is none of

greater moment to be found in all the pages of Holy Writ, and which it

behooves every Christian to make the utmost endeavor to clearly

understand. It is an abstract expression denoting the satisfaction of

Christ in its relation to the Divine Law. It is a descriptive name for

the material cause of the sinner's acceptance before God. "The

righteousness of God" is a phrase referring to the finished work of the

Mediator as approved by the Divine tribunal, being the meritorious

cause of our acceptance before the throne of the Most High.

In the succeeding chapters (D.V.) we shall examine in more detail this

vital expression "the righteousness of God," which connotes that

perfect satisfaction which the Redeemer offered to Divine justice on

the behalf of and in the stead of that people which had been given to

Him. Suffice it now to say that that "righteousness" by which the

believing sinner is justified is called "the righteousness of God" (Rom

1:17; 3:21) because He is the appointer, approver, and imputer of it.

It is called "the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (2

Peter 1:1) because He wrought it out and presented it unto God. It is

called "the righteousness of faith" (Rom. 4:13) because faith is the

apprehender and receiver of it. It is called "man's righteousness" (Job

33:26) because it was paid for him and imputed to him. All these varied

expressions refer to so many aspects of that one perfect obedience unto

death which the Saviour performed for His people.

Yes, so vital did the Apostle Paul, under the guidance of the Holy

Spirit, esteem this doctrine of Justification, that he shows at length

how the denial and perversion of it by the Jews was the chief reason of

their being rejected by God: see the closing verses of Romans 9 and the

beginning of chapter 10. Again; throughout the whole Epistle to the

Galatians we find the Apostle engaged in most strenuously defending and

zealously disputing with those who had assailed this basic truth.

Therein he speaks of the contrary doctrine as ruinous and fatal to the

souls of men, as subversive of the cross of Christ, and calls it

another gospel, solemnly declaring "though we, or an angel from heaven,

preach any other gospel unto you... let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8).

Alas, that under the latitudinal liberty and false "charity" of our

day, there is now so little holy abhorrence of that preaching which

repudiates the vicarious obedience of Christ which is imputed to the

believer.

Under God, the preaching of this grand truth brought about the greatest

revival which the Cause of Christ has enjoyed since the days of the

Apostles. "This was the great fundamental distinguishing doctrine of

the Reformation, and was regarded by all the Reformers as of primary

and paramount importance. The leading charge which they adduced against

the Church of Rome was that she had corrupted and perverted the

doctrine of Scripture upon this subject in a way that was dangerous to

the souls of men; and it was mainly by the exposition, enforcement, and

application of the true doctrine of God's Word in regard to it, that

they assailed and overturned the leading doctrines and practices of the

Papal system. There is no subject which possesses more of intrinsic

importance than attaches to this one, and there is none with respect to

which the Reformers were more thoroughly harmonious in their

sentiments" (W. Cunningham).

This blessed doctrine supplies the grand Divine cordial to revive one

whose soul is cast down and whose conscience is distressed by a felt

sense of sin and guilt, and longs to know the way and means whereby he

may obtain acceptance with God and the title unto the Heavenly

inheritance. To one who is deeply convinced that he has been a

life-long rebel against God, a constant transgressor of His Holy Law,

and who realizes he is justly under His condemnation and wrath, no

inquiry can be of such deep interest and pressing moment as that which

relates to the means of restoring him to the Divine favour, remitting

his sins, and fitting him to stand unabashed in the Divine presence:

till this vital point has been cleared to the satisfaction of his

heart, all other information concerning religion will be quite

unavailing.

"Demonstrations of the existence of God will only serve to confirm and

more deeply impress upon his mind the awful truth which he already

believes, that there is a righteous Judge, before whom he must appear,

and by whose sentence his final doom will be fixed. To explain the

moral law to him, and inculcate the obligations to obey it, will be to

act the part of a public accuser, when he quotes the statutes of the

land in order to show that the charges which he has brought against the

criminal at the bar are well founded, and, consequently, that he is

worthy of punishment. The stronger the arguments are by which you

evince the immortality of the soul, the more clearly do you prove that

his punishment will not be temporary, and that there is another state

of existence, in which he will be fully recompensed according to his

desert" (J. Dick).

When God Himself becomes a living reality unto the soul, when His awful

majesty, ineffable holiness, inflexible justice, and sovereign

authority, are really perceived, even though most inadequately,

indifference to His claims now gives place to a serious concern. When

there is a due sense of the greatness of our apostasy from God, of the

depravity of our nature, of the power and vileness of sin, of the

spirituality and strictness of the law, and of the everlasting burnings

awaiting God's enemies, the awakened soul cries out, "Wherewith shall I

come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come

before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the

LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers

of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my

body for the sin of my soul?" (Micah 6:6, 7). Then it is that the poor

soul cries out, "How then can man be justified with God? or how can he

be clean that is born of a woman?" (Job 25:4). And it is in the blessed

doctrine which is now to be before us that we are taught the method

whereby a sinner may obtain peace with his Maker and rise to the

possession of eternal life.

Again; this doctrine is of inestimable value unto the conscientious

Christian who daily groans under a sense of his inward corruptions and

innumerable failures to measure up to the standard which God has set

before him. The Devil, who is "the accuser of our brethren" (Rev.

12:10), frequently charges the believer with hypocrisy before God,

disquiets his conscience, and seeks to persuade him that his faith and

piety are nought but a mask and outward show, by which he has not only

imposed upon others, but also on himself. But, thank God, Satan may be

overcome by "the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 12:11): by looking away from

incurably depraved self, and viewing the Surety, who has fully answered

for the Christian's every failure, perfectly atoned for his every sin,

and brought in an "everlasting righteousness" (Dan. 9:24), which is

placed to his account in the high court of Heaven. And thus, though

groaning under his infirmities, the believer may possess a victorious

confidence which rises above every fear.

This it was which brought peace and joy to the heart of the Apostle

Paul: for while in one breath he cried, "O wretched man that I am! who

shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24), in the next

he declared, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are

in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). To which he added, "Who shall lay any

thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is

he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen

again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh

intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

(vv. 33-35). May it please the God of all grace to so direct our pen

and bless what we write unto the readers, that not a few who are now

found in the gloomy dungeons of Doubting Castle, may be brought out

into the glorious light and liberty of the full assurance of faith.

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2. Its Meaning

Deliverance from the condemning sentence of the Divine Law is the

fundamental blessing in Divine salvation: so long as we continue under

the curse, we can neither be holy nor happy. But as to the precise

nature of that deliverance, as to exactly what it consists of, as to

the ground on which it is obtained, and as to the means whereby it is

secured, much confusion now obtains. Most of the errors which have been

prevalent on this subject arose from the lack of a clear view of the

thing itself, and until we really understand what justification is, we

are in no position to either affirm or deny anything concerning it. We

therefore deem it requisite to devote a whole chapter unto a careful

defining and explaining this word "justification," endeavouring to show

both what it signifies, and what it does not connote.

Between Protestants and Romanists there is a wide difference of opinion

as to the meaning of the term "justify": they affirming that to justify

is to make inherently righteous and holy; we insisting that to justify

signifies only to formally pronounce just or legally declare righteous.

Popery includes under justification the renovation of man's moral

nature or deliverance from depravity, thereby confounding justification

with regeneration and sanctification. On the other hand, all

representative Protestants have shown that justification refers not to

a change of moral character, but to a change of legal status; though

allowing, yea, insisting, that a radical change of character invariably

accompanies it. It is a legal change from a state of guilt and

condemnation to a state of forgiveness and acceptance; and this change

is owing solely to a gratuitous act of God, founded upon the

righteousness of Christ (they having none of their own) being imputed

to His people.

"We simply explain justification to be an acceptance by which God

receives us into His favour and esteems us as righteous persons; and we

say that it consists in the remission of sins and the imputation of the

righteousness of Christ... Justification, therefore, is no other than

an acquittal from guilt of him who was accused, as though his innocence

has been proved. Since God, therefore, justifies us through the

mediation of Christ, He acquits us, not by an admission of our personal

innocence, but by an imputation of righteousness; so that we, who are

unrighteous in ourselves, are considered as righteous in Christ" (John

Calvin, 1559).

"What is justification? Answer: Justification is an act of God's free

grace unto sinners, in which He pardoneth all their sins, accepteth and

accounteth their persons righteous in His sight; not for any thing

wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience

and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received

by faith alone" (Westminster Catechism, 1643).

"We thus define the Gospel justification of a sinner: It is a judicial,

but gracious act of God, whereby the elect and believing sinner is

absolved from the guilt of his sins, and hath a right to eternal life

adjudged to him, on account of the obedience of Christ, received by

faith" (H. Witsius, 1693).

"A person is said to be justified when he is approved of God as free

from the guilt of sin and its deserved punishment; and as having that

righteousness belonging to him that entitles to the reward of life"

(Jonathan Edwards, 1750).

Justification, then, refers not to any subjective change wrought in a

person's disposition, but is solely an objective change in his standing

in relation to the law. That to justify cannot possibly signify to make

a person inherently righteous or good is most clearly to be seen from

the usage of the term itself in Scripture. For example, in Proverbs

17:15 we read, "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth

the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD": now obviously he

who shall make a "wicked" person just is far from being an "abomination

to the LORD," but he who knowingly pronounces a wicked person to be

righteous is obnoxious to Him.

Again; in Luke 7:29 we read, "And all the people that heard Him, and

the publicans, justified God": how impossible it is to make the words

"justified God" signify any moral transformation in His character; but

understand those words to mean that they declaredHim to be righteous,

and all ambiguity is removed. Once more, in 1 Timothy 3:16 we are told

that the incarnate Son was "justified in (or "by") the Spirit": that is

to say, He was publicly vindicated at His resurrection, exonerated from

the blasphemous charges which the Jews had laid against Him.

Justification has to do solely with the legal side of salvation. It is

a judicial term, a word of the law courts. It is the sentence of a

judge upon a person who has been brought before him for judgment. It is

that gracious act of God as Judge, in the high court of Heaven, by

which He pronounces an elect and believing sinner to be freed from the

penalty of the law, and fully restored unto the Divine favour. It is

the declaration of God that the party arraigned is fully conformed to

the law; justice exonerates him because justice has been satisfied.

Thus, justification is that change of status whereby one, who being

guilty before God, and therefore under the condemning sentence of His

Law, and deserving of nought but an eternal banishment from His

presence, is received into His favour and given a right unto all the

blessings which Christ has, by His perfect satisfaction, purchased for

His people.

In substantiation of the above definition, the meaning of the term

"justify" may be determined, first, by its usage in Scripture. "And

Judah said, What shall we say unto my lord? what shall we speak? or how

shall we clear (this Hebrew word "tsadag" always signifies "justify")

ourselves?" (Gen. 44:16). Here we have an affair which was entirely a

judicial one. Judah and his brethren were arraigned before the governor

of Egypt, and they were concerned as to how they might procure a

sentence in their favour. "If there be a controversy between men, and

they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them; then they

shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked" (Deut. 25:1). Here

again we see plainly that the term is a forensic one, used in

connection with the proceedings of law-courts, implying a process of

investigation and judgment. God here laid down a rule to govern the

judges in Israel: they must not "justify" or pass a sentence in favour

of the wicked: compare 1 Kings 8:31, 32.

"If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am

perfect, it shall also prove me perverse" (Job 9:20): the first member

of this sentence is explained in the second--"justify" there cannot

signify to make holy, but to pronounce a sentence in my own favour.

"Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu ... against Job ... because he

justified himself rather than God" (Job 32:2), which obviously means,

because he vindicated himself rather than God. "That Thou mightest be

justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest" (Psa.

51:4), which signifies that God, acting in His judicial office, might

be pronounced righteous in passing sentence. "But wisdom is justified

of her children" (Matt. 11:19), which means that they who are truly

regenerated by God have accounted the wisdom of God (which the scribes

and Pharisees reckoned foolishness) to be, as it really is, consummate

wisdom: they cleared it of the calumny of folly.

2. The precise force of the term "to justify" may be ascertained by

noting that it is the antithesis of "to condemn." Now to condemn is not

a process by which a good man is made bad, but is the sentence of a

judge upon one because he is a transgressor of the law. "He that

justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both

are abomination to the LORD" (Prov. 17:15 and cf. Deut. 25:1). "For by

thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be

condemned" (Matt. 12:37). "It is God that justifieth. Who is he that

condemneth?" (Rom. 8:33, 34). Now it is undeniable that "condemnation"

is the passing of a sentence against a person by which the punishment

prescribed by the law is awarded to him and ordered to be inflicted

upon him; therefore justification is the passing of a sentence in

favour of a person, by which the reward prescribed by the law is

ordered to be given to him.

3. That justification is not an experimental change from sin to

holiness, but a judicial change from guilt to no-condemnation may be

evidenced by the equivalent terms used for it. For example, in Romans

4:6 we read, "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man,

unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works": so that legal

"righteousness" is not a habit infused into the heart, but a gift

transferred to our account. In Romans 5:9, 10 to be "justified by

Christ's blood" is the same as being "reconciled by His death," and

reconciliation is not a transformation of character, but the effecting

of peace by the removal of all that causes offense.

4. From the fact that the judicial side of our salvation is propounded

in Scripture under the figures of a forensic trial and sentence. "(1) A

judgment is supposed in it, concerning which the Psalmist prays that it

may not proceed on the terms of the law: Psalm 143:2. (2) The Judge is

God Himself: Isaiah 50:7, 8. (3) The tribunal whereon God sits in

judgment is the Throne of Grace: Hebrews 4:16. (4) A guilty person.

This is the sinner, who is so guilty of sin as to be obnoxious to the

judgment of God: Romans 3:18. (5) Accusers are ready to propose and

promote the charge against the guilty person; these are the law (John

5:45), conscience (Rom. 2:15), and Satan: Zechariah 3:2, Revelation

12:10. (6) The charge is admitted and drawn up in a handwriting' in

form of law, and is laid before the tribunal of the Judge, in bar to

the deliverance of the offender: Colossians 2:14. (7) A plea is

prepared in the Gospel for the guilty person: this is grace, through

the blood of Christ, the ransom paid, the eternal righteousness brought

in by the Surety of the covenant: Romans 3:23, 25, Daniel 9:24. (8)

Hereunto alone the sinner betakes himself, renouncing all other

apologies or defensatives whatever: Psalm 130:2, 3; Luke 18:13. (9) To

make this plea effectual we have an Advocate with the Father, and He

pleads His own propitiation for us: 1 John 2:1, 2. (10) The sentence

hereon is absolution, on account of the sacrifice and righteousness of

Christ; with acceptation into favour, as persons approved of God:

Romans 8:33, 34; 2 Corinthians 5:21" (John Owen).

From what has been before us, we may perceive what justification is

not. First, it differs from regeneration. "Whom He called, them He also

justified" (Rom. 8:30). Though inseparably connected, effectual calling

or the new birth and justification are quite distinct. The one is never

apart from the other, yet they must not be confounded. In the order of

nature regeneration precedes justification, though it is in no sense

the cause or ground of it: none is justified till he believes, and none

believe till quickened. Regeneration is the act of the Father (James

1:18), justification is the sentence of the Judge. The one gives me a

place in God's family, the other secures me a standing before His

throne. The one is internal, being the impartation of Divine life to my

soul: the other is external, being the imputation of Christ's obedience

to my account. By the one I am drawn to return in penitence to the

Father's house, by the other I am given the "best robe" which fits me

for His presence.

Second, it differs from sanctification. Sanctification is moral or

experimental, justification is legal or judicial. Sanctification

results from the operation of the Spirit in me, justification is based

upon what Christ has done for me. The one is gradual and progressive,

the other is instantaneous and immutable. The one admits of degrees,

and is never perfect in this life; the other is complete and admits of

no addition. The one concerns my state, the other has to do with my

standing before God. Sanctification produces a moral transformation of

character, justification is a change of legal status: it is a change

from guilt and condemnation to forgiveness and acceptance, and this

solely by a gratuitous act of God, founded upon the imputation of

Christ's righteousness, through the instrument of faith alone. Though

justification is quite separate from sanctification, yet sanctification

ever accompanies it.

Third, it differs from forgiveness. In some things they agree. It is

only God who can forgive sins (Mark 2:7) and He alone can justify (Rom.

3:30). His free grace is the sole moving cause in the one (Eph. 1:7)

and of the other (Rom. 3:24). The blood of Christ is the procuring

cause of each alike: Matthew 26:28, Romans 5:9. The objects are the

same: the persons that are pardoned are justified, and the same that

are justified are pardoned; to whom God imputes the righteousness of

Christ for their justification to them He gives the remission of sins;

and to whom He does not impute sin, but forgives it, to them He imputes

righteousness without works (Romans 4:6-8). Both are received by faith

(Acts 26:18, Romans 5:1). But though they agree in these things, in

others they differ.

God is said to be "justified" (Rom. 3:4), but it would be blasphemy to

speak of Him being "pardoned"--this at once shows the two things are

diverse. A criminal may be pardoned, but only a righteous person can

truly be justified. Forgiveness deals only with a man's acts,

justification with the man himself. Forgiveness respects the claims of

mercy, justification those of justice. Pardon only remits the curse due

unto sin; in addition justification confers a title to Heaven.

Justification applies to the believer with respect to the claims of the

law, pardon with respect to the Author of the law. The law does not

pardon, for it knows no relaxation; but God pardons the transgressions

of the law in His people by providing a satisfaction to the law

adequate to their transgressions. The blood of Christ was sufficient to

procure pardon (Eph. 1:7), but His righteousness is needed for

justification (Rom. 5:19). Pardon takes away the filthy garments, but

justification provides a change of raiment (Zech. 3:4). Pardon frees

from death (2 Sam. 12:13), but righteousness imputed is called

"justification of life" (Rom. 5:18). The one views the believer as

completely sinful, the other as completely righteous. Pardon is the

remission of punishment, justification is the declaration that no

ground for the infliction of punishment exists. Forgiveness may be

repeated unto seventy times seven, justification is once for all.

From what has been said in the last paragraph we may see what a serious

mistake it is to limit justification to the mere forgiveness of sins.

Just as "condemnation" is not the execution of punishment, but rather

the formal declaration that the accused is guilty and worthy of

punishment; so "justification" is not merely the remission of

punishment but the judicial announcement that punishment cannot be

justly inflicted--the accused being fully conformed to all the positive

requirements of the law in consequence of Christ's perfect obedience

being legally reckoned to his account. The justification of a believer

is no other than his being admitted to participate in the reward

merited by his Surety. Justification is nothing more or less than the

righteousness of Christ being imputed to us: the negative blessing

issuing therefrom is the remission of sins; the positive, a title to

the heavenly inheritance.

Beautifully has it been pointed out that "We cannot separate from

Immanuel His own essential excellency. We may see Him bruised and given

like beaten incense to the fire, but was incense ever burned without

fragrance, and only fragrance being the result? The name of Christ not

only cancels sin, it supplies in the place of that which it has

canceled, its own everlasting excellency. We cannot have its nullifying

power only; the other is the sure concomitant. So was it with every

typical sacrifice of the Law. It was stricken: but as being spotless it

was burned on the altar for a sweet-smelling savor. The savor ascended

as a memorial before God: it was accepted for, and its value was

attributed or imputed to him who had brought the vicarious victim. If

therefore, we reject the imputation of righteousness, we reject

sacrifice as revealed in Scripture; for Scripture knows of no sacrifice

whose efficacy is so exhausted in the removal of guilt as to leave

nothing to be presented in acceptableness before God" (B.W. Newton).

"What is placing our righteousness in the obedience of Christ, but

asserting that we are accounted righteous only because His obedience is

accepted for us as if it were our own? Wherefore Ambrose appears to me

to have very beautifully exemplified this righteousness in the

benediction of Jacob: that as he, who had on his own account no claim

to the privileges of primogeniture, being concealed in his brother's

habit, and invested with his garment, which diffused a most excellent

odor, insinuated himself into the favour of his father, that he might

receive the benediction to his own advantage, under the character of

another; so we shelter ourselves under the precious purity of Christ"

(John Calvin).

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3. Its Problem

In this and the following chapter our aim will be fourfold. First, to

demonstrate the impossibility of any sinner obtaining acceptance and

favour with God on the ground of his own performances. Second, to show

that the saving of a sinner presented a problem which nought but

omniscience could solve, but that the consummate wisdom of God has

devised a way whereby He can pronounce righteous a guilty transgressor

of His Law without impeaching His veracity, sullying His holiness, or

ignoring the claims of justice; yea, in such a way that all His

perfections have been displayed and magnified, and the Son of His love

glorified. Third, point out the sole ground on which an awakened

conscience can find solid and stable peace. Fourth, seek to give God's

children a clearer understanding of the exceeding riches of Divine

grace, that their hearts may be drawn out in fervent praise unto the

Author of "so great salvation."

But let it be pointed out at the onset that, any reader who has never

seen himself under the white light of God's holiness, and who has never

felt His Word cutting him to the very quick, will be unable to fully

enter into the force of what we are about to write. Yea, in all

probability, he who is unregenerate is likely to take decided exception

unto much of what will be said, denying that any such difficulty exists

in the matter of a merciful God pardoning one of His offending

creatures. Or, if he does not dissent to that extent, yet he will most

likely consider that we have grossly exaggerated the various elements

in the case we are about to present, that we have pictured the sinner's

condition in far darker hues than was warranted. This must be so, for

he has no experimental acquaintance with God, nor is he conscious of

the fearful plague of his own heart.

The natural man cannot endure the thought of being thoroughly searched

by God. The last thing he desires is to pass beneath the all-seeing eye

of his Maker and Judge, so that his every thought and desire, his most

secret imagination and motive, stands exposed before Him. It is indeed

a most solemn experience when we are made to feel with the Psalmist, "O

LORD, Thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting

and mine uprising, Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou

compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my

ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, Thou

knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid

Thine hand upon me" (Psa. 139:1-5).

Yes, dear reader, the very last thing which the natural man desires is

to be searched, through and through by God, and have his real character

exposed to view. But when God undertakes to do this very thing--which

He either will do in grace in this life, or in judgment in the Day to

come--there is no escape for us. Then it is we may well exclaim,

"Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy

presence? If I ascend up into Heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed

in Hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning,

and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall Thy hand

lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the

darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me" (Psa.

139:7-11). Then it is we shall be assured, "Yea, the darkness hideth

not fromThee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the

light are both alike to Thee" (v. 12).

Then it is that the soul is awakened to a realization of Who it is with

whom it has to do. Then it is that he now perceives something of the

high claims of God upon him, the just requirements of His Law, the

demands of His holiness. Then it is that he realizes how completely he

has failed to consider those claims, how fearfully he has disregarded

that law, how miserably he falls short of meeting those demands. Now it

is that he perceives he has been "a transgressor from the womb" (Isa.

48:8), that so far from having lived to glorify His Maker, he has done

nought but follow the course of this world and fulfill the lust of the

flesh. Now it is he realizes that there is "no soundness" in him but,

from the sole of the foot even unto the head, "wounds, and bruises, and

putrifying sores" (Isa. 1:6). Now it is he is made to see that all his

righteousness are as "filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6).

"It is easy for any one in the cloisters of the schools to indulge

himself in idle speculations of the merit of works to justify men; but

when he comes into the presence of God, he must bid farewell to these

amusements, for there the business is transacted with seriousness, and

no ludicrous logomachy practiced. To this point, then, must our

attention be directed, if we wish to make any useful inquiry concerning

true righteousness; how we can answer the celestial Judge, when He

shall call us to an account. Let us place that Judge before our eyes,

not according to the spontaneous imaginations of our minds, but

according to the descriptions given of Him in the Scripture; which

represents Him as one whose refulgence eclipses the stars, whose power

melts the mountains, whose anger shakes the earth, whose wisdom takes

the subtle in their own craftiness, whose purity makes all things

appear polluted, whose righteousness even the angels are unable to

bear, who acquits not the guilty, whose vengeance, when it is once

kindled, penetrates even to the abyss of Hell" (John Calvin).

Ah, my reader, tremendous indeed are the effects produced in the soul

when one is really brought into the presence of God, and is granted a

sight of His awesome majesty. While we measure ourselves by our fellow

men, it is easy to reach the conclusion that there is not much wrong

with us; but when we approach the dread tribunal of ineffable holiness,

we form an entirely different estimate of our character and conduct.

While we are occupied with earthly objects we may pride ourselves in

the strength of our visive faculty, but fix the gaze steadily on the

midday sun and under its dazzling brilliance the weakness of the eye

will at once become apparent. In like manner, while I compare myself

with other sinners I can but form a wrong estimate of myself, but if I

gauge my life by the plummet of God's Law, and do so in the light of

His holiness, I must "Abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job

42:6).

But not only has sin corrupted man's being, it has changed his relation

to God: it has "alienated" him (Eph. 4:18), and brought him under His

righteous condemnation. Man has broken God's Law in thought and word

and deed, not once, but times without number. By the Divine tribunal he

is pronounced an incorrigible transgressor, a guilty rebel. He is under

the curse of his Maker. The law demands that its punishment shall be

inflicted upon him; justice clamours for satisfaction. The sinner's

case is deplorable, then, to the last degree. When this is painfully

felt by the convicted conscience, its agonized possessor cries out,

"How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is

born of a woman?" (Job 25:4). How indeed! Let us now consider the

various elements which enter into this problem.

1. The requirements of God's Law. "Every question therefore, respecting

justification necessarily brings before us the judicial courts of God.

The principles of those courts must be determined by God alone. Even to

earthly governors we concede the right of establishing their own laws,

and appointing the mode of their enforcement. Shall we then accord this

title to man, and withhold it from the all-wise and almighty God?

Surely no presumption can be greater than for the creature to sit in

judgment on the Creator, and pretend to determine what should, or

should not be, the methods of His government. It must be our place

reverently to listen to His own exposition of the principles of His own

courts, and humbly to thank Him for His goodness in condescending to

explain to us what those principles are. As sinners, we can have no

claim on God. We do have claim to a revelation that should acquaint us

with His ways.

"The judicial principles of the government of God, are, as might be

expected, based upon the absolute perfectness of His own holiness. This

was fully shown both in the prohibitory and in the mandatory

commandments of the law as given at Sinai. That law prohibited not only

wrong deeds and wrong counsels of heart, but it went deeper still. It

prohibited even wrong desires and wrong tendencies, saying, thou shalt

not be concupiscent'--that is, thou shalt not have, even momentarily,

one desire or tendency that is contrary to the perfectness of God. And

then as to its positive requirements, it demanded the perfect,

unreserved, perpetual surrender of soul and body, with all its powers,

to God and to His service. Not only was it required, that love to

Him--love perfect and unremitted--should dwell as a living principle in

the heart, but also that it should be developed in action, and that

unvaryingly. The mode also of the development throughout, was required

to be as perfect as the principle from which the development sprang.

"If any among the children of men be able to substantiate a claim to

prefectness such as this, the Courts of God are ready to recognize it.

The God of Truth will recognize a truthful claim wherever it is found.

But if we are unable to present any such claim--if corruption be found

in us and in our ways--if in any thing we have fallen short of God's

glory, then it is obvious that however willing the Courts of God may be

to recognize perfectness wherever it exists, such willingness can

afford no ground of hope to those, who, instead of having perfectness,

have sins and short-comings unnumbered" (B.W. Newton).

2. The indictment preferred against us. "Hear, O heavens, and give ear,

O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up

children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner,

and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, My people doth

not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of

evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD,

they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone

away backward" (Isa. 1:2-4). The eternal God justly charges us with

having broken all His commandments--some in act, some in word, all of

them in thought and imagination.

The enormity of this charge is heightened by the fact that against

light and knowledge we chose the evil and forsook the good: that again

and again we deliberately turned aside from God's righteous Law, and

went astray like lost sheep, following the evil desires and devices of

our own hearts. Above, we find God complaining that inasmuch as we are

his creatures, we ought to have obeyed Him, that inasmuch as we owe our

very lives to His daily care we ought to have rendered Him fealty

instead of disobedience, and have been His loyal subjects instead of

turning traitors to His throne. No exaggeration of sin is brought

against us, but a statement of fact is declared which it is impossible

for us to gainsay. We are ungrateful, unruly, ungodly creatures. Who

would keep a horse that refused to work? Who would retain a dog which

barked and flew at us? Yet we have broken God's sabbaths, despised His

reproofs, abused His mercies.

3. The sentence of the law. This is clearly announced in the Divine

oracles, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which

are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10). Whoever

violates a single precept of the Divine Law exposes himself to the

displeasure of God, and to punishment as the expression of that

displeasure. No allowance is made for ignorance, no distinction is made

between persons, no relaxation of its strictness is permissible: "The

soul that sinneth it shall die" is its inexorable pronouncement. No

exception is made whether the transgressor be young or old, rich or

poor, Jew or Gentile: "the wages of sin is death"; for "the wrath of

God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness

of men" (Rom. 1:18).

4. The Judge Himself is inflexibly just. In the high court of Divine

justice God takes the law in its strictest and sternest aspect, and

judges rigidly according to the letter. "But we are sure that the

judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such

things... Who will render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom.

2:2, 6). God is inexorably righteous, and will not show any partiality

either to the law or to its transgressor. The Most High has determined

that His Holy Law shall be faithfully upheld and its sanctions strictly

enforced.

What would this country be like if all its judges ceased to uphold and

enforce the laws of the land? What conditions would prevail were

sentimental mercy to reign at the expense of righteousness? Now God is

the Judge of all the earth and the moral Ruler of the universe. Holy

Writ declares that "justice and judgment," and not pity and clemency,

are the "habitation" of His "throne" (Psa. 89:14). God's attributes do

not conflict with each other. His mercy does not override His justice,

nor is His grace ever shown at the expense of righteousness. Each of

His perfections is given free course. For God to give a sinner entrance

into Heaven simply because He loved him, would be like a judge

sheltering an escaped convict in his own home merely because he pitied

him. Scripture emphatically declares that God, "will by no means clear

the guilty" (Exo. 34:7).

5. The sinner is unquestionably guilty. It is not merely that he has

infirmities or that he is not as good as he ought to be: he has set at

nought God's authority, violated His commandments, trodden His Laws

under foot. And this is true not only of a certain class of offenders,

but "all the world" is "guilty before God" (Rom. 3:19). "There is none

righteous, no, not one: They are all gone out of the way, they are

together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not

one" (Rom. 3:10, 12). It is impossible for any man to clear himself

from this fearful charge. He can neither show that the crimes of which

he is accused have not been committed, nor that having been committed,

he had a right to do them. He can neither disprove the charges which

the law preferred against him, nor justify himself in the perpetration

of them.

Here then is how the case stands. The law demands personal, perfect,

and perpetual conformity to its precepts, in heart and act, in motive

and performance. God charges each one of us with having failed to meet

those just demands, and declares we have violated His commandments in

thought and word and deed. The law therefore pronounces upon us a

sentence of condemnation, curses us, and demands the infliction of its

penalty, which is death. The One before whose tribunal we stand is

omniscient, and cannot be deceived or imposed upon; He is inflexibly

just, and swayed by no sentimental considerations. We, the accused, are

guilty, unable to refute the accusations of the law, unable to

vindicate our sinful conduct, unable to offer any satisfaction or

atonement for our crimes. Truly, our case is desperate to the last

degree.

Here, then, is the problem. How can God justify the willful

transgressor of His Law without justifying his sins? How can God

deliver him from the penalty of His broken Law without compromising His

holiness and going back upon His word that He will "by no means clear

the guilty"? How can life be granted the guilty culprit without

repealing the sentence "the soul that sinneth it shall die"? How can

mercy be shown to the sinner without justice being flouted? It is a

problem which must forever have baffled every finite intelligence. Yet,

blessed be His name, God has, in His consummate wisdom, devised a way

whereby the "chief of sinners" may be dealt with by Him as though he

were perfectly innocent; nay more, He pronounces him righteous, up to

the required standard of the law, and entitled to the reward of eternal

life. How this can be will be taken up in the next chapter.

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4. Its Basis

In our last chapter we contemplated the problem which is presented in

the justifying or pronouncing righteous one who is a flagrant violater

of the Law of God. Some may have been surprised at the introduction of

such a term as "problem": as there are many in the ranks of the ungodly

who feel that the world owes them a living, so there are not a few

Pharisees in Christendom who suppose it is due them that at death their

Creator should take them to Heaven. But different far is it with one

who has been enlightened and convicted by the Holy Spirit, so that he

sees himself to be a filthy wretch, a vile rebel against God. Such an

one will ask, seeing that the word of God so plainly declares "there

shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither

whatsoever worketh abomination" (Rev. 21:27), how is it possible that I

can ever gain admission into the heavenly Jerusalem? How can it be that

one so completely devoid of righteousness as I am, and so filled with

unrighteousness, should ever be pronounced just by a holy God?

Various attempts have been made by unbelieving minds to solve this

problem. Some have reasoned that if they now turn over a new leaf,

thoroughly reform their lives and henceforth walk in obedience to God's

Law, they shall be approved before the Divine Tribunal. This scheme,

reduced to simple terms, is salvation by our own works. But such a

scheme is utterly untenable, and salvation by such means is absolutely

impossible. The works of a reformed sinner cannot be the meritorious or

efficacious cause of his salvation, and that for the following reasons.

First, no provision is made for his previous failures. Suppose that

henceforth I never again transgress God's Law, what is to atone for my

past sins? Second, a fallen and sinful creature cannot produce that

which is perfect, and nothing short of perfection is acceptable to God.

Third, were it possible for us to be saved by our own works, then the

sufferings and death of Christ were needless. Fourth, salvation by our

own merits would entirely eclipse the glory of Divine grace.

Others suppose this problem may be solved by an appeal to the bare

mercy of God. But mercy is not an attribute that overshadows all the

other Divine perfections: justice, truth, and holiness are also

operative in the salvation of God's elect. The law is not set aside,

but honored and magnified. The truth of God in His solemn threats is

not sullied, but faithfully carried out. The Divine righteousness is

not flouted, but vindicated. One of God's perfections is not exercised

to the injury of any of the others, but all of them shine forth with

equal clearness in the plan which Divine wisdom devised. Mercy at the

expense of justice over-ridden would not suit the Divine government,

and justice enforced to the exclusion of mercy would not befit the

Divine character. The problem which no finite intelligence could solve

was how both might be exercised in the sinner's salvation.

A striking example of mercy helpless before the claims of the law

occurs in Daniel 6. There we find that Darius, the king of Babylon, was

induced by his nobles to sign a decree that any subject within his

kingdom who should pray, or "ask a petition of any God or man for

thirty days" save the king himself, should be cast into the den of

lions. Daniel knowing this, nevertheless, continued to pray before God

as hitherto. Whereupon the nobles acquainted Darius with his violation

of the royal edict, which "according to the law of the Medes and

Persians altereth not," and demanded his punishment. Now Daniel stood

high in the king's favour, and he greatly desired to show clemency unto

him, so he "set his heart on Daniel to deliver him, and he labored till

the going down of the sun to deliver him." But he found no way out of

the difficulty: the law must be honored, so Daniel was cast into the

lion's den.

An equally striking example of law helpless in the presence of mercy is

found in John 8. There we read of a woman taken in the act of adultery.

The scribes and Pharisees apprehended her and set her before Christ,

charging her with the crime, and reminding the Saviour that "Moses in

the law commanded us that such should be stoned." She was

unquestionably guilty, and her accusers were determined that the

penalty of the law should be inflicted upon her. The Lord turned to

them and said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a

stone at her"; and they, being convicted by their own conscience, went

out one by one, leaving the adulteress alone with Christ. Turning to

her, He asked, "Woman, where are thine accusers, hath no man condemned

thee?" She replied, "No man, Lord," and He answered, "Neither do I

condemn thee, go, and sin no more."

The two adverse principles are seen operating in conjuction in Luke 15.

The "Father" could not have the (prodigal) son at His table clad in the

rags of the far country, but He could go out and meet him in those

rags: He could fall on his neck and kiss him in those rags--it was

blessedly characteristic of His grace so to do; but to seat him at His

table in garments suited to the swine-troughs would not be fitting. But

the grace which brought the Father out to the prodigal "reigned"

through that righteousness which brought the prodigal in to the

Father's house. It had not been "grace" had the Father waited till the

prodigal decked himself out in suitable garments of his own providing;

nor would it have been "righteousness" to bring him to His table in his

rags. Both grace and righteousness shone forth in their respective

beauty when the Father said "bring forth the best robe, and put it on

him."

It is through Christ and His atonement that the justice and mercy of

God, His righteousness and grace, meet in the justifying of a believing

sinner. In Christ is found the solution to every problem which sin has

raised. In the Cross of Christ every attribute of God shines forth in

its meridian splendor. In the satisfaction which the Redeemer offered

unto God every claim of the law, whether preceptive or penal, has been

fully met. God has been infinitely more honored by the obedience of the

last Adam than He was dishonored by the disobedience of the first Adam.

The justice of God was infinitely more magnified when its awful sword

smote the beloved Son, than had every member of the human race burned

for ever and ever in the lake of fire. There is infinitely more

efficacy in the blood of Christ to cleanse, than there is in sin to

befoul. There is infinitely more merit in Christ's one perfect

righteousness than there is demerit in the combined unrighteousness of

all the ungodly. Well may we exclaim, "But God forbid that I should

glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14).

But while many are agreed that the atoning death of Christ is the

meritorious cause of His peoples' salvation, there are now few indeed

who can give any clear Scriptural explanation of the way and manner by

which the work of Christ secures the justification of all who believe.

Hence the need for a clear and full statement thereon. Hazy ideas at

this point are both dishonouring to God and unsettling to our peace. It

is of first importance that the Christian should obtain a clear

understanding of the ground on which God pardons his sins and grants

him a title to the heavenly inheritance. Perhaps this may best be set

forth under three words: substitution, identification, imputation. As

their Surety and Sponsor, Christ entered the place occupied by His

people under the law, so identifying Himself with them as to be their

Head and Representative, and as such He assumed and discharged all

their legal obligations: their liabilities being transferred to Him,

His merits being transferred to them.

The Lord Jesus has wrought out for His people a perfect righteousness

by obeying the law in thought and word and deed, and this righteousness

is imputed to them, reckoned to their account. The Lord Jesus has

suffered the penalty of the law in their stead, and through His atoning

death they are cleansed from all guilt. As creatures they were under

obligations to obey Gods' Law; as criminals (transgressors) they were

under the death-sentence of the law. Therefore, to fully meet our

liabilities and discharge our debts it was necessary that our

Substitute should both obey and die. The shedding of Christ's blood

blotted out our sins, but it did not, of itself, provide the "best

robe" for us. To silence the accusations of the law against us so that

there is now "no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" is

simply a negative blessing: something more was required, namely, a

positive righteousness, the keeping of the law, so that we might be

entitled to its blessing and reward.

In Old Testament times the name under which the Messiah and Mediator

was foretold is, "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer. 23:6). It was

plainly predicted by Daniel that He should come here to "finish the

transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation

for iniquity, and tobring in everlasting righteousness" (9:24). Isaiah

announced "Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and

strength: even to Him shall men come; and all that are incensed against

Him shall be ashamed. In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be

justified, and shall glory" (45:24, 25). And again, he represents each

of the redeemed exclaiming, "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my

soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the

garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of

righteousness" (61:10).

In Romans 4:6-8 we read, "David also describeth the blessedness of the

man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying,

Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are

covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Here

we are shown the inseparability of the two things: God imputing

"righteousness" and God not imputing "sins." The two are never divided:

unto whom God imputes not sin He imputes righteousness; and unto whom

He imputes righteousness, He imputes not sin. But the particular point

which we are most anxious for the reader to grasp is, Whose

"righteousness" is it that God imputes or reckons to the account of the

one who believes? The answer is, that righteousness which was wrought

out by our Surety, that obedience to the law which was vicariously

rendered by our Sponsor, even "the righteousness of God and our Saviour

Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:1). This righteousness is not only "unto all"

but also "upon all them that believe" (Rom. 3:22). It is called "the

righteousness of God" because it was the righteousness of the God-man

Mediator, just as in Acts 20:28 His blood is call the blood of God.

The "righteousness of God" which is mentioned so frequently in the

Roman epistle refers not to the essential righteousness of the Divine

character, for that cannot possibly be imputed or legally transferred

to any creature. When we are told in 10:3 that the Jews were "ignorant

of God's righteousness" it most certainly does not mean they were in

the dark concerning the Divine rectitude or that they knew nothing

about God's justice; but it signifies that they were unenlightened as

to the righteousness which the God-man Mediator had vicariously wrought

out for His people. This is abundantly clear from the remainder of that

verse: "and going about to establish their own righteousness"--not

their own rectitude or justice, but performing works by which they

hoped to merit acceptance with God. So tightly did they cling to this

delusion, they, "submitted not themselves unto the righteousness of

God": that is, they refused to turn from their self-righteousness and

put their trust in the obedience and sufferings of the incarnate Son of

God.

"I would explain what we mean by the imputation of Christ's

righteousness. Sometimes the expression is taken by our divines in a

larger sense, for the imputation of all that Christ did and suffered

for our redemption whereby we are free from guilt, and stand righteous

in the sight of God; and so implies the imputation both of Christ's

satisfaction and obedience. But here I intend it in a stricter sense,

for the imputation of that righteousness or moral goodness that

consists in the obedience of Christ. And by that obedience being

imputed to us, is meant no other than this, that that righteousness of

Christ is accepted for us, and admitted instead of that perfect

inherent righteousness that ought to be in ourselves: Christ's perfect

obedience shall be reckoned to our account, so that we shall have the

benefit of it, as though we had performed it ourselves: and so we

suppose, that a title to eternal life is given us as the reward of this

righteousness" (Jonathan Edwards).

The one passage which casts the clearest light upon that aspect of

justification which we are now considering is 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For

He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be

made the righteousness of God in Him." Here we have the counter

imputations: of our sins to Christ, of His righteousness to us. As the

teaching of this verse is of such vital moment let us endeavor to

consider its terms the more closely. How was Christ "made sin for us"?

By God imputing to Him our disobedience, or our transgressions of the

law; in like manner, we are made "the righteousness of God in Him" (in

Christ, not in ourselves) by God imputing to usChrist's obedience, His

fulfilling the precepts of the law for us.

As Christ "knew no sin" by inward defilement or personal commission, so

we "knew" or had no righteousness of our own by inward conformity to

the law, or by personal obedience to it. As Christ was "made sin" by

having our sins placed to His account or charged upon Him in a judicial

way, and as it was not by any criminal conduct of His own that He was

"made sin," so it is not by any pious activities of our own that we

become "righteous": Christ was not "made sin" by the infusion of

depravity, nor are we "made righteous" by the infusion of holiness.

Though personally holy, our Sponsor did, by entering our law-place,

render Himself officially liable to the wrath of God; and so though

personally unholy, we are, by virtue of our legal identification with

Christ, entitled to the favor of God. As the consequence of Christ's

being "made sin for us" was, that "the LORD laid on Him the iniquity of

us all" (Isa. 53:6), so the consequence of Christ's obedience being

reckoned to our account is that God lays righteousness "upon all them

that believe" (Rom. 3:22). As our sins were the judicial ground of the

sufferings of Christ, by which sufferings He satisfied Justice; so

Christ's righteousness is the judicial ground of our acceptance with

God, by which our pardon is an act of Justice.

Notice carefully that in 2 Corinthians 5:21 it is God who "made" or

legally constituted Christ to be "sin for us," though as Hebrews 10:7

shows, the Son gladly acquiesced therein. "He was made sin by

imputation: the sins of all His people were transferred unto Him, laid

upon Him, and placed to His account and having them upon Him He was

treated by the justice of God as if He had been not only a sinner, but

a mass of sin: for to be made sin is a stronger expression than to be

made a sinner" (John Gill). "That we might be made the righteousness of

God in Him" signifies to be legally constituted righteous before

God--justified. "It is a righteousness in Him,' in Christ, and not in

ourselves, and therefore must mean the righteousness of Christ: so

called, because it is wrought by Christ, who is God over all, the true

God, and eternal life" (Ibid.).

The same counter-exchange which has been before us in 2 Corinthians

5:21 is found again in Galatians 3:13, 14, "Christ hath redeemed us

from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is

written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing

of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ." As the

Surety of His people, Christ was "made under the law" (Gal. 4:4), stood

in their law-place and stead, and having all their sins imputed to Him,

and the law finding them all upon Him, condemned Him for them; and so

the justice of God delivered Him up to the accursed death of the cross.

The purpose, as well as the consequence, of this was "That the blessing

of Abraham might come on the Gentiles": the "blessing of Abraham" (as

Rom. 4 shows) was justification by faith through the righteousness of

Christ.

"Upon a Life I did not live,

Upon a Death I did not die;

Another's death, Another's life

I'd rest my soul eternally."

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5. Its Nature

Justification, strictly speaking, consists in God's imputing to His

elect the righteousness of Christ, that alone being the meritorious

cause or formal ground on which He pronounces them righteous: the

righteousness of Christ is that to which God has respect when He

pardons and accepts the sinner. By the nature of justification we have

reference to the constituent elements of the same, which are enjoyed by

the believer. These are, the non-imputation of guilt or the remission

of sins, and second, of the investing of the believer with a legal

title to Heaven. The alone ground on which God forgives any man's sins,

and admits him into His judicial favour, is the vicarious work of his

Surety--that perfect satisfaction which Christ offered to the law on

his behalf. It is of great importance to be clear on the fact that

Christ was "made under the law" not only that He might redeem His

people "from the curse of the law" (Gal. 3:13), but also that they

might "receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4, 5), that is, be

invested with the privileges of sons.

This grand doctrine of Justification was proclaimed in its purity and

clarity by the Reformers--Luther, Calvin, Zanchius, Peter Martyr, etc.;

but it began to be corrupted in the seventeenth century by men who had

only a very superficial knowledge of it, who taught that justification

consisted merely in the removal of guilt or forgiveness of sins,

excluding the positive admittance of man into God's judicial favour: in

other words, they restricted justification unto deliverance from Hell,

failing to declare that it also conveys a title unto Heaven. This error

was perpetuated by John Wesley, and then by the Plymouth Brethren, who,

denying that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer,

seek to find their title to eternal life in a union with Christ in His

resurrection. Few today are clear upon the twofold content of

Justification, because few today understand the nature of that

righteousness which is imputed to all who believe.

To show that we have not misrepresented the standard teachings of the

Plymouth Brethren on this subject, we quote from Mr. W. Kelly's "Notes

on Romans." In his "Introduction" he states, "There is nothing to

hinder our understanding the righteousness of God' in its usual sense

of an attribute or quality of God" (p. 35). But how could an

"attribute" or "quality" of God be "upon all them that believe" (Rom.

3:22)? Mr. Kelly will not at all allow that the "righteousness of God"

and "the righteousness of Christ" are one and the same, and hence, when

he comes to Romans 4 (where so much is said about "righteousness" being

imputed to the believer) he evacuates the whole of its blessed teaching

by trying to make out that this is nothing more than our own faith,

saying of Abraham, "his faith in God's word as that which he exercised,

and which was accounted as righteousness" (p. 47).

The "righteousness of Christ" which is imputed to the believer consists

of that perfect obedience which He rendered unto the precepts of God's

Law and that death which He died under the penalty of the law. It has

been rightly said that, "There is the very same need of Christ's

obeying the law in our stead, in order to the reward, as of His

suffering the penalty of the law in our stead in order to our escaping

the penalty; and the same reason why one should be accepted on our

account as the other... To suppose that all Christ does in order to

make atonement for us by suffering is to make Him our Saviour but in

part. It is to rob Him of half His glory as a Saviour. For if so, all

that He does is to deliver us from Hell; He does not purchase Heaven

for us" (Jonathan Edwards). Should any one object to the idea of Christ

"purchasing" Heaven for His people, he may at once be referred to

Ephesians 1:14, where Heaven is expressly designated "the purchased

possession."

The imputation to the believer's account of that perfect obedience

which his Surety rendered unto the law for him is plainly taught in

Romans 5:18, 19, "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon

all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free

gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's

disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall

many be made righteous." Here the "offence" or "disobedience" of the

first Adam is set over against the "righteousness" or "obedience" of

the last Adam, and inasmuch as the disobedience of the former was an

actual transgression of the law, therefore the obedience of the latter

must be His active obedience unto the law; otherwise the force of the

Apostle's antithesis would fail entirely. As this vital point (the

chief glory of the Gospel) is now so little understood, and in some

quarters disputed, we must enter into some detail.

The one who was justified upon his believing sustained a twofold

relation unto God: first, he was a responsible creature, born under the

law; second, he was a criminal, having transgressed that law--though

his criminality has not canceled his obligation to obey the law any

more than a man who recklessly squanders his money is no longer due to

pay his debts. Consequently, justification consists of two parts,

namely, an acquittal from guilt, or the condemnation of the law

(deliverance from Hell), and the receiving him into God's favour, on

the sentence of the law's approval (a legal title to Heaven). And

therefore, the ground upon which God pronounces him just is also a

double one, as the one complete satisfaction of Christ is viewed in its

two distinct parts: namely, His vicarious obedience unto the precepts

of the law, and His substitutionary death under the penalty of the law,

the merits of both being equally imputed or reckoned to the account of

him who believes.

Against this it has been objected, "The law requires no man to obey and

die too." To which we reply in the language of J. Hervey (1750), "But

did it not require a transgressor to obey and die? If not, then

transgression robs the law of its right, and vacates all obligation to

obedience. Did it not require the Surety for sinful men to obey and

die? If the Surety dies only, He only delivers from penalty. But this

affords no claim to life, no title to a reward-- unless you can produce

some such edict from the Court of Heaven-- Suffer this, and thou shalt

live.' I find it written In keeping Thy commandments there is great

reward' (Psa. 19:11), but nowhere do I read, In undergoing Thy curse,

there is the same reward.' Whereas, when we join the active and passive

obedience of our Lord--the peace-speaking Blood with the Life-giving

righteousness--both made infinitely meritorious and infinitely

efficacious by the Divine glory of His person, how full does our

justification appear! How firm does it stand!"

It is not sufficient that the believer stand before God with no sins

upon him--that is merely negative. The holiness of God requires a

positive righteousness to our account--that His Law be perfectly kept.

But we are unable to keep it, therefore our Sponsor fulfilled it for

us. By the blood-shedding of our blessed Substitute the gates of Hell

have been forever shut against all those for whom He died. By the

perfect obedience of our blessed Surety the gates of Heaven are opened

wide unto all who believe. My title for standing before God, not only

without fear, but in the conscious sunshine of His full favour, is

because Christ has been made "righteousness" unto me (1 Cor. 1:30).

Christ not only paid all my debts, but fully discharged all my

responsibilities. The law-Giver is my law-Fulfiller. Every holy

aspiration of Christ, every godly thought, every gracious word, every

righteous act of the Lord Jesus, from Bethlehem to Calvary, unite in

forming that "best robe" in which the seed royal stand arrayed before

God.

Yet sad to say, even so widely-read and generally-respected a writer as

the late Sir Rob. Anderson, said in his book, "The Gospel and Its

Ministry" (Chapter on Justification by Blood), "Vicarious obedience is

an idea wholly beyond reason; how could a God of righteousness and

truth reckon a man who has broken law to have kept law, because some

one else has kept it? The thief is not declared to be honest because

his neighbour or his kinsman is a good citizen." What a pitiable

dragging down to the bar of sin-polluted human reason, and a measuring

by worldly relations, of that Divine transaction wherein the "manifold

wisdom of God" was exercised! What is impossible with men is possible

with God. Did Sir Robert never read that Old Testament prediction

wherein the Most High God declared, "Therefore, behold, I will proceed

to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a

wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the

understanding of their prudent men shall be hid" (Isa. 29:14)?

It is pointed out that, "In the human realm, both innocence and

righteousness are transferable in their effects, but that in themselves

they are untransferable." From this it is argued that neither sin nor

righteousness are in themselves capable of being transferred, and that

though God treated Christ as if He were the sinner, and deals with the

believer as though he were righteous, nevertheless, we must not suppose

that either is actually the case; still less ought we to affirm that

Christ deserved to suffer the curse, or that His people are entitled to

be taken to Heaven. Such is a fair sample of the theological ignorance

of these degenerate times, such is a representative example of how

Divine things are being measured by human standards; by such

sophistries is the fundamental truth of imputation now being

repudiated.

Rightly did W. Rushton, in his "Particular Redemption," affirm, "In the

great affair of our salvation, our God stands single and alone. In this

most glorious work, there is such a display of justice, mercy, wisdom

and power, as never entered into the heart of man to conceive, and

consequently, can have no parallel in the actions of mortals. Who hath

declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have

not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside Me; a just God and a

Saviour; there is none beside Me': Isaiah 45:21." No, in the very

nature of the case no analogy whatever is to be found in any human

transactions with God's transferring our sins to Christ or Christ's

obedience to us, for the simple but sufficient reason thatno such union

exists between worldlings as obtains between Christ and His people. But

let us further amplify this counter-imputation.

The afflictions which the Lord Jesus experienced were not only

sufferings at the hands of men, but also enduring punishment at the

hand of God: "it pleased the LORD to bruise Him" (Isa. 53:10); "Awake,

O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the man that is My Fellow,

saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd" (Zech. 13:7) was His

edict. But lawful "punishment" presupposes criminality; a righteous God

had never inflicted the curse of the law upon Christ unless He had

deserved it. That is strong language we are well aware, yet not

stronger than what Holy Writ fully warrants, and things need to be

stated forcibly and plainly today if an apathetic people is to be

aroused. It was because God had transferred to their Substitute all the

sins of His people that, officially, Christ deserved to be paid sin's

wages.

The translation of our sins to Christ was clearly typed out under the

Law: "And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live

goat, (expressing identification with the substitute), and confess over

him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their

transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the

goat (denoting transference), and shall send him away by the hand of a

fit man into the wilderness: And the goat shall bear upon him all their

iniquities unto a land not inhabited" (Lev. 16:21, 22). So too it was

expressly announced by the Prophets: "The LORD hath laid on Him the

iniquity of us all... He shall bear their iniquities" (Isa. 53:6, 11).

In that great Messianic Psalm, the 69th, we hear the Surety saying, "O

God, Thou knowest My foolishness; and My sins are not hid from Thee"

(v. 5)--how could the spotless Redeemer speak thus, unless the sins of

His people had been laid uponHim?

When God imputed sin to Christ as the sinner's Surety, He charged Him

with the same, and dealt with Him accordingly. Christ could not have

suffered in the stead of the guilty unless their guilt had been first

transferred to Him. The sufferings of Christ were penal. God by act of

transcendent grace (to us) laid the iniquities of all that are saved

upon Christ, and in consequence, Divine justice finding sin upon Him,

punished Him. He who will by no means clear the guilty must strike

through sin and smite its bearer, no matter whether it be the sinner

himself or One who vicariously takes his place. But as G.S. Bishop well

said, "When justice once strikes the Son of God, justice exhausts

itself. Sin is amerced in an Infinite Object." The atonement of Christ

was contrary to our processes of law because it rose above their finite

limitations!

Now as the sins of him who believes were, by God, transferred and

imputed to Christ so that God regarded and treated Him

accordingly--visiting upon Him the curse of the law, which is death;

even so the obedience or righteousness of Christ is, by God,

transferred and imputed to the believer so that God now regards and

deals with him accordingly--bestowing upon him the blessing of the law,

which is life. And any denial of that fact, no matter by whomsoever

made, is a repudiation of the cardinal principle of the Gospel. "The

moment the believing sinner accepts Christ as his Substitute, he finds

himself not only freed from his sins, but rewarded: he gets all Heaven

because of the glory and merits of Christ (Rom. 5:17). The atonement,

then, which we preach is one of absolute exchange (1 Peter 3:18). It is

that Christ took our place literally, in order that we might take His

place literally--that God regarded and treated Christ as the Sinner,

and that He regards and treats the believing sinner as Christ.

"It is not enough for a man to be pardoned. He, of course, is then

innocent--washed from his sin--put back again, like Adam in Eden, just

where he was. But that is not enough. It was required of Adam in Eden

that he should actuallykeep the command. It was not enough that he did

not break it, or that he is regarded, through the Blood, as though he

did not break it. He must keep it: he must continue in all things that

are written in the book of the law to do them. How is this necessity

supplied? Man must have a righteousness, or God cannot accept him. Man

must have a perfect obedience, or else God cannot reward him" (G.S.

Bishop). That necessary and perfect obedience is to be found alone in

that perfect life, lived by Christ in obedience to the law, before He

went to the cross, which is reckoned to the believer's account.

It is not that God treats as righteous one who is not actually so (that

would be a fiction), but that He actually constitutes the believer so,

not by infusing a holy nature in his heart, but by reckoning the

obedience of Christ to his account. Christ's obedience is legally

transferred to him so that he is now rightly and justly regarded as

righteous by the Divine Law. It is very far more than a naked

pronouncement of righteousness upon one who is without any sufficient

foundation for the judgment of God to declare him righteous. No, it is

a positive and judicial act of God "whereby, on the consideration of

the mediation of Christ, He makes an effectual grant and donation of a

true, real, perfect righteousness, even that of Christ Himself unto all

that do believe, and accounting it as theirs, on His own gracious act,

both absolves them from sin, and granteth them right and title unto

eternal life" (John Owen).

It now remains for us to point out the ground on whichGod acts in this

counter-imputation of sin to Christ and righteousness to His people.

That ground was the Everlasting Covenant. The objection that it is

unjust the innocent should suffer in order that the guilty may escape

loses all its force once the Covenant-Headship and responsibility of

Christ is seen, and the covenant-oneness with Him of those whose sins

He bore. There could have been no such thing as a vicarious sacrifice

unless there had been some union between Christ and those for whom He

died, and that relation of union must have subsisted before He died,

yea, before our sins were imputed to Him. Christ undertook to make full

satisfaction to the law for His people because He sustained to them the

relation of a Surety. But what justified His acting as their Surety? He

stood as their Surety because He was their Substitute: He acted on

their behalf, because He stood in their room. But what justified the

substitution?

No satisfactory answer can be given to the last question until the

grand doctrine of everlasting covenant-oneness comes into view: that is

the great underlying relation. The federal oneness between the Redeemer

and the redeemed, the choosing of them in Christ before the foundation

of the world (Eph. 1:4), by which a legal union was established between

Him and them, is that which alone accounts for and justifies all else.

"For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified areall of

one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb.

2:11). As the Covenant-Head of His people, Christ was so related to

them that their responsibilities necessarily became His, and we are so

related to Him that His merits necessarily become ours. Thus, as we

said in an earlier chapter, three words give us the key to and sum up

the whole transaction: substitution, identification, imputation--all of

which rest upon covenant-oneness. Christ was substituted for us,

because He is one with us--identified with us, and we with Him. Thus

God dealt with us as occupying Christ's place of worthiness and

acceptance. May the Holy Spirit grant both writer and reader such an

heart-apprehension of this wondrous and blessed truth, that overflowing

gratitude may move us unto fuller devotedness unto Him who loved us and

gave Himself for us.

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6. Its Source

Let us here review, briefly, the ground which we have already covered.

We have seen, first, that "to justify" means to pronounce righteous. It

is not a Divine work, but a Divine verdict, the sentence of the Supreme

Court, declaring that the one justified stands perfectly conformed to

all the requirements of the law. Justification assures the believer

that the Judge of all the earth is for him, and not against him: that

justice itself is on his side. Second, we dwelt upon the great and

seemingly insoluable problem which is thereby involved: how a God of

truth can pronounce righteous one who is completely devoid of

righteousness, how He can receive into His judicial favour one who is a

guilty criminal, how He can exercise mercy without insulting justice,

how He can be gracious and yet enforce the high demands of His Law.

Third, we have shown that the solution to this problem is found in the

perfect satisfaction which the incarnate Son rendered unto Divine Law,

and that on the basis of that satisfaction God can truthfully and

righteously pronounce just all who truly believe the Gospel.

In our last article we pointed out that the satisfaction which Christ

made to the Divine Law consists of two distinct parts, answering to the

twofold need of him who is to be justified. First, as a responsible

creature I am under binding obligations to keep the law--to love God

with all my heart and my neighbor as myself. Second, as a criminal I am

under the condemnation and curse of that law which I have constantly

transgressed in thought and word and deed. Therefore, if another was to

act as my surety and make reparation for me, he must perfectly obey all

the precepts of the law, and then endure the awful penalty of the law.

That is exactly what was undertaken and accomplished by the Lord Jesus

in His virtuous life and vicarious death. By Him every demand of the

law was fulfilled; by Him every obligation of the believer was fully

met.

It has been objected by some that the obedience of Christ could not be

imputed to the account of others, for being "made under the law" (Gal.

4:4) as man, Heowed submission to the law on His own account. This is a

serious mistake, arising out of a failure to recognize the absolute

uniqueness of the Man Christ Jesus. Unlike us, He was never placed

under the Adamic Covenant, and therefore He owed nothing to the law.

Moreover, the manhood of Christ never had a separate existence: in the

virgin's womb the eternal Son took the seed of Mary into union with His

Deity, so that whereas the first man was of the earth, earthy, "the

second Man is the Lord from Heaven" (1 Cor. 15:47), and as such He was

infinitely superior to the law, owing nothing to it, being personally

possessed of all the excellencies of Deity. Even while He walked this

earth "in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."

It was entirely for His peoples' sake that the God-man Mediator was

"made under the law." It was in order to work out for them a perfect

righteousness, which should be placed to their account, that He took

upon Himself the form of a servant and became "obedient unto death."

What has been said above supplies the answer to another foolish

objection which has been made against this blessed truth, namely, that

if the obedience of the Man Christ Jesus were transferable it would be

available only for one other man, seeing that every human being is

required to obey the law, and that if vicarious obedience be acceptable

to God then there would have to be as many separate sureties as there

are believers who are saved. That would be true if the "surety" were

merely human, but inasmuch as the Surety provided by God is the God-man

Mediator, His righteousness is of infinite value, for the law was

more"honoured and magnified" by the obedience of "the Lord from Heaven"

than had every member of the human race perfectly kept it. The

righteousness of the God-man Mediator is of infinite value, and

therefore available for as many as God is pleased to impute it unto.

The value or merit of an action increases in proportion to the dignity

of the person who performs it, and He who obeyed in the room and stead

of the believer was not only a holy man, but the Son of the living God.

Moreover, let it be steadily borne in mind that the obedience which

Christ rendered to the law was entirely voluntary. Prior to His

incarnation, He was under no obligation to the law, for He had Himself

(being God) formulated that law. His being made of a woman and made

under the law was entirely a free act on His own part. We come into

being and are placed under the law without our consent; but the Lord

from Heaven existed before His incarnation, and assumed our nature by

His spontaneous act: "Lo, I come... I delight to do Thy will" (Psa.

40:7, 8). No other person could use such language, for it clearly

denotes a liberty to act or not to act, which no mere creature

possesses. Placing Himself under the law and rendering obedience to it

was founded solely on His own voluntary deed. His obedience was

therefore a "free will offering," and therefore as He did not owe

obedience to the law by any prior obligation, not being at all

necessary for Himself, it is available for imputation to others, that

they should be rewarded for it.

If, then, the reader has been able to follow us closely in the above

observations, it should be clear to him that when Scripture speaks of

God "justifying the ungodly" the meaning is that the believing sinner

is brought into an entirely new relation to the law; that in

consequence of Christ's righteousness being made over to him, he is now

absolved from all liability to punishment, and is given a title to all

the reward merited by Christ's obedience. Blessed, blessed truth for

comforting the conscientious Christian who daily groans under a sense

of his sad failures and who mourns because of his lack of practical

conformity to the image of Christ. Satan is ever ready to harass such

an one and tell him his profession is vain. But it is the believer's

privilege to overcome him by "the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 12:11)--to

remind himself anew that Another has atoned for all his sins, and that

despite his innumerable shortcomings he still stands "accepted in the

Beloved" (Eph. 1:6). If I am truly resting on the finished work of

Christ for me, the Devil cannot successfully lay anything to my charge

before God, though if I am walking carelessly He will suffer him to

charge my conscience with unrepented and unconfessed sins.

In our last chapter, under the nature of justification, we saw that the

constituent elements of this Divine blessing are two in number, the one

being negative in its character, the other positive. The negative

blessing is the cancellation of guilt, or the remission of sins--the

entire record of the believer's transgressions of the law, filed upon

the Divine docket, having been blotted out by the precious blood of

Christ. The positive blessing is the bestowal upon the believer of an

inalienable title to the reward which the obedience of Christ merited

for him--that reward is life, the judicial favour of God, Heaven

itself. The unchanging sentence of the law is "the man which doeth

those things shall live by them" (Rom. 10:5). As we read in Romans

7:10, "the commandment, which was ordained to life." It is just as true

that obedience to the law secured life, as disobedience insured death.

When the young ruler asked Christ "what good thing shall I do, that I

may have eternal life?" He answered, "If thou wilt enter into life,

keep the commandments" (Matt. 19:16, 17).

It was because His people had failed to "keep the commandments" that

the God-man Mediator was "made under the law," and obeyed it for them.

And therefore its reward of "life" is due unto those whose Surety He

was; yea, due unto Christ Himself to bestow upon them. Therefore did

the Surety, when declaring "I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have

finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do" (John 17:4), remind the

Father, "that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given

Him" (v. 2). But more, on the footing of justice, Christ demands that

His people be taken to Heaven, saying, "Father, I will that they also,

whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am" (John 17:24)--He claims

eternal life for His people on the ground of His finished work, as the

reward of His obedience.

"Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to

condemnation; even so by the righteousness of One the free gift came

upon all men unto justification of life" (Rom. 5:18). The offence of

the first Adam brought down the curse of the broken law upon the whole

human race; but the satisfaction of the last Adam secured the blessing

of the fulfilled law upon all those whom He represented. Judgment unto

condemnation is a law term intending eternal death, the wages of sin;

the "free gift" affirms that a gratuitous justification is bestowed

upon all its recipients--"justification of life" being the issue of the

gift, parallel with "shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ" (v. 17).

The sentence of justification adjudges and entitles its object unto

eternal life.

Having now considered the two great blessings which come to the

believer at his justification--deliverance from the curse of the law

(death) and a title to the blessing of the law (life)--let us now seek

to take a view of the originating source from which they proceed. This

is the free, pure sovereign grace of God: as it is written "Being

justified freely by His grace" (Rom. 3:24). What is grace? It is God's

unmerited and uninfluenced favour, shown unto the undeserving and

hell-deserving: neither human worthiness, works or willingness,

attracting it, nor the lack of them repelling or obstructing it. What

could there be in me to win the favourable regard of Him who is of too

pure eyes to behold evil, and move Him to justify me? Nothing whatever;

nay, there was everything in me calculated to make Him abhor and

destroy me--my very self-righteous efforts to earn a place in Heaven

deserving only a lower place in Hell. If, then, I am ever to be

"justified" by God it must be by pure grace, and that alone.

Grace is the very essence of the Gospel--the only hope for fallen men,

the sole comfort of saints passing through much tribulation on their

way to the kingdom of God. The Gospel is the announcement that God is

prepared to deal with guilty rebels on the ground of free favour, of

pure benignity; that God will blot out sin, cover the believing sinner

with a robe of spotless righteousness, and receive him as an accepted

son: not on account of anything he has done or ever will do, but of

sovereign mercy, acting independently of the sinner's own character and

deservings of eternal punishment. Justification is perfectly gratuitous

so far as we are concerned, nothing being required of us in order to

it, either in the way of price and satisfaction or preparation and

meetness. We have not the slightest degree of merit to offer as the

ground of our acceptance, and therefore if God ever does accept us it

must be out of unmingled grace.

It is as "the God of all grace" (1 Peter 5:10) that Jehovah justifies

the ungodly. It is as "the God of all grace" He seeks, finds, and saves

His people: asking them for nothing, giving them everything. Strikingly

is this brought out in that word "being justified freely by His grace"

(Rom. 3:24), the design of that adverb being to exclude all

consideration of anything in us or from us which should be the cause or

condition of our justification. That same Greek adverb is translated

"without a cause" in John 15:25--"they hated Me without a cause." The

world's hatred of Christ was "without a cause" so far as He was

concerned: there was nothing whatever in Him which, to the slightest

degree, deserved their enmity against Him: there was nothing in Him

unjust, perverse, or evil; instead, there was everything in Him which

was pure, holy, lovely. In like manner, there is nothing whatever in us

to call forth the approbation of God: by nature there is "no good

thing" in us; but instead, everything that is evil, vile, loathsome.

"Being justified without a cause by His GRACE." How this tells out the

very heart of God! While there was no motive to move Him, outside of

Himself, there was one inside Himself; while there was nothing in us to

impel God to justify us, His own grace moved Him, so that He devised a

way whereby His wondrous love could have vent and flow forth to the

chief of sinners, the vilest of rebels. As it is written, "I, even I,

am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will

not remember thy sins" (Isa. 43:25). Wondrous, matchless grace! We

cannot for a moment look outside the grace of God for any motive or

reason why He should ever have noticed us, still less had respect unto

such ungodly wretches.

The first moving cause, then, that inclined God to show mercy to His

people in their undone and lost condition, was His own wondrous

grace--unsought, uninfluenced, unmerited by us. He might justly have

left us all obnoxious to the curse of His Law, without providing any

Surety for us, as He did the fallen angels; but such was His grace

toward us that "He spared not His own Son." "Not by works of

righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved

us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

Which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That

being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the

hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:5-7). It was His own sovereign favour

and good will which actuated God to form this wondrous scheme and

method of justification.

Against what has been said above, it has been objected by Socinians and

their echoists that this cannot be: if the believing sinner is

justified upon the grounds of a full satisfaction having been made to

God for him by a surety, then his discharge from condemnation and his

reception into God's judicial favour must be an act of pure justice,

and therefore could not be by grace. Or, if it be purely an act of

Divine grace, then no surety can have obeyed the law in the believer's

stead. But this is to confound two distinct things: the relation of God

to Christ the Surety, and the relation of God to me the sinner. It was

grace which transferred my sins to Christ; it was justice which smote

Christ on account of those sins. It was grace which appointed me unto

everlasting bliss; it is justice to Christ which requires I shall enjoy

that which He purchased for me.

Toward the sinner justification is an act of free unmerited favour; but

toward Christ, as a sinner's Surety, it is an act of justice that

eternal life should be bestowed upon those for whom His meritorious

satisfaction was made. First, it was pure grace that God was willing to

accept satisfaction from the hands of a surety. He might have exacted

the debt from us in our own persons, and then our condition had been

equally miserable as that of the fallen angels, for whom no mediator

was provided. Second, it was wondrous grace that God Himself provided a

Surety for us, which we could not have done. The only creatures who are

capable of performing perfect obedience are the holy angels, yet none

of them could have assumed and met our obligations, for they are not

akin to us, possessing not human nature, and therefore incapable of

dying. Even had an angel became incarnate, his obedience to the law

could not have availed for the whole of God's elect, for it would not

have possessed infinite value.

None but a Divine person taking human nature into union with Himself

could present unto God a satisfaction adequate for the redemption of

His people. And it was impossible for men to have found out that

Mediator and Surety: it must have its first rise in God, and not from

us: it was He that "found" a ransom (Job 33:24) and laid help upon One

that is "mighty" (Psa. 89:19). In the last place, it was amazing grace

that the Son was willing to perform such a work for us, without whose

consent the justice of God could not have exacted the debt from Him.

And His grace is the most eminent in that He knew beforehand all the

unspeakable humiliation and unparalleled suffering which He would

encounter in the discharge of this work, yet that did not deter Him;

nor was He unapprized of the character of those for whom He did it--the

guilty, the ungodly, the hell-deserving; yet He shrank not back.

"O to grace how great a debtor,

Daily I'm constrained to be!

Let Thy grace, Lord, like a fetter,

Bind my wandering heart to Thee."

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7. Its Objects

We have now reached a point in our discussion of this mighty theme

where it is timely for us to ask the question, Who are the ones that

God justifies? The answer to that question will necessarily vary

according to the mental position we occupy. From the standpoint of

God's eternal decrees the reply must be, God's elect: Romans 8:33. From

the standpoint of the effects produced by quickening operations of the

Holy Spirit the reply must be, those who believe: Acts 13:39. But from

the standpoint of what they are, considered in themselves, the reply

must be, the ungodly: Romans 4:5. The persons are the same, yet

contemplated in three different relations. But here a difficulty

presents itself: If faith be essential in order to justification, and

if a fallen sinner must be quickened by the Holy Spirit before he can

believe, then with what propriety can a regenerated person, with the

spiritual grace of faith already in his heart, be described as

"ungodly"?

The difficulty pointed out above is self-created. It issues from

confounding things which differ radically. It is the result of bringing

in the experimental state of the person justified, when justification

has to do only with his judicial status. We would emphasize once more

the vital importance of keeping quite distinct in our minds the

objective and subjective aspects of truth, the legal and the

experimental: unless this be steadily done, nought but confusion and

mistakes can mark our thinking. When contemplating what he is in

himself, considered alone, even the Christian mournfully cries "O

wretched man that I am"; but when he views himself in Christ, as

justified from all things, he triumphantly exclaims, "who shall lay

anything to my charge!"

Above, we have pointed out that from the viewpoint of God's eternal

decrees the question "Who are the ones whom God justifies?" must be

"the elect." And this brings us to a point on which some eminent

Calvinists have erred, or at least, have expressed themselves faultily.

Some of the older theologians, when expounding this doctrine, contended

for the eternal justification of the elect, affirming that God

pronounced them righteous before the foundation of the world, and that

their justification was then actual and complete, remaining so

throughout their history in time, even during the days of their

unregeneracy and unbelief; and that the only difference their faith

made was in making manifest God's eternal justification in their

consciences. This is a serious mistake, resulting (again) from failure

to distinguish between things which differ.

As an immanent act of God's mind, in which all things (which are to us

past, present, and future) were cognized by Him, the elect might be

said to be justified from all eternity. And, as an immutable act of

God's will, which cannot be frustrated, the same may be predicated

again. But as an actual, formal, historical sentence, pronounced by God

upon us, not so. We must distinguish between God's looking upon the

elect in the purpose of his grace, and the objects of justification

lying under the sentence of the law: in the former, He loved His people

with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3); in the latter, we were "by nature

the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph. 2:3). Until they believe,

every descendant of Adam is "condemned already" (John 3:18), and to be

under God' condemnation is the very opposite of being justified.

In his ponderous treatise on justification, the Puritan Thomas Goodwin

made clear some vital distinctions, which if carefully observed will

preserve us from error on this point. "1. In the everlasting covenant.

We may say of all spiritual blessings in Christ, what is said of Christ

Himself, that their goings forth are from everlasting.' Justified then

we were when first elected, though not in our own persons, yet in our

Head (Eph. 1:3). 2. There is a farther act of justifying us, which

passed from God towards us in Christ, upon His payment and performance

at His resurrection (Rom. 4:25, 1 Tim. 3:16). 3. But these two acts of

justification are wholly out of us, immanent acts in God, and though

they concern us and are towards us, yet not acts of God upon us, they

being performed towards us not as actually existing in ourselves, but

only as existing in our Head, who covenanted for us and represented us:

so as though by those acts we are estated into a right and title to

justification, yet the benefit and possession of that estate we have

not without a farther act being passed upon us."

Before regeneration we are justified by existing in our Head only, as a

feoffee, held in trust for us, as children under age. In addition to

which, we "are to be in our own persons, though still through Christ,

possessed of it, and to have all the deeds and evidences of it

committed to the custody and apprehension of our faith. We are in our

own persons made true owners and enjoyers of it, which is immediately

done at that instant when we first believe; which act (of God) is the

completion and accomplishment of the former two, and is that grand and

famous justification by faith which the Scripture so much

inculcates--note the now' in Romans 5:9, 11; 8:1!... God doth judge and

pronounce His elect ungodly and unjustified till they believe" (Ibid.)

God's elect enter this world in precisely the same condition and

circumstances as do the non-elect. They are "by nature the children of

wrath, even as others" (Eph. 2:3), that is, they are under the

condemnation of their original sin in Adam (Rom. 5:12, 18, 19) and they

are under the curse of God's Law because of their own constant

transgressions of it (Gal. 3:10). The sword of Divine justice is

suspended over their heads, and the Scriptures denounce them as rebels

against the Most High. As yet, there is nothing whatever to distinguish

them from those who are "fitted to destruction." Their state is woeful

to the last degree, their situation perilous beyond words; and when the

Holy Spirit awakens them from the sleep of death, the first message

which falls upon their ears is, "Flee from the wrath to come." But how

and whither, they, as yet, know not. Then it is they are ready for the

message of the Gospel.

Let us turn now to the more immediate answer to our opening inquiry,

Who are the ones that God justifies? A definite reply is given in

Romans 4:5: "Him that justifieth the"--whom? the holy, the faithful,

the fruitful? no, the very reverse: "Him that justifieth the ungodly."

What a strong, bold, and startling word is this! It becomes yet more

emphatic when we observe what precedes: "But to him that worketh not,

but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly." The subjects of

justification, then, are viewed in themselves, apart from Christ, as

not only destitute of a perfect righteousness, but as havingno

acceptable works to their account. They are denominated, and considered

as ungodly when the sentence of justification is pronounced upon them.

The mere sinner is the subject on which grace is magnified, toward

which grace reigns in justification!

"To say, he who worketh not is justified through believing, is to say

that his works, whatever they be, have no influence in his

justification, nor hath God, in justifying him, any respect unto them.

Wherefore he alone who worketh not, is the subject of justification,

the person to be justified. That is, God considereth no man's works, no

man's duties of obedience, in his justification; seeing we are

justified freely by His grace" (John Owen). Those whom God, in His

transcendent mercy, justifies, are not the obedient, but the

disobedient; not those who have been loyal and loving subjects of His

righteous government, but they who have stoutly defied Him and trampled

His laws beneath their feet. Those whom God justifies are lost sinners,

lying in a state of defection from Him, under a loss of original

righteousness (in Adam) and by their own transgressions brought in

guilty before His tribunal (Rom. 3:19). They are those who by character

and conduct have no claim upon Divine blessing, and deserve nought but

unsparing judgment at God's hand.

"Him that justifieth the ungodly." It is deplorable to see how many

able commentators have weakened the force of this by affirming that,

while the subject of justification is"ungodly" up to the time of his

justification, he is not so at the moment of justification itself. They

argue that, inasmuch as the subject of justification is a believer at

the moment of his justification and that believing presupposes

regeneration--a work of Divine grace wrought in the heart--he could not

be designated "ungodly." This seeming difficulty is at once removed by

calling to mind that justification is entirely a law matter and not an

experimental thing at all. In the sight of God's Law every one whom God

justifies is"ungodly" until Christ's righteousness is made over to him.

The awful sentence "ungodly" rests as truly upon the purest virgin as

much as it does upon the foulest prostitute until God imputes Christ's

obedience to her.

"Him that justifieth the ungodly." These words cannot mean less than

that God, in the act of justification, has no regard whatever to any

thing good resting to the credit of the person He justifies. They

declare, emphatically, that immediately prior to that Divine act, God

beholds the subject only as unrighteous, ungodly, wicked, so that no

good, either in or by the person justified, can possibly be the ground

on which or the reason for which He justifies him. This is further

evident from the words "to him that worketh not": that this includes

not only works which the ceremonial law required, but all works of

morality and godliness, appear from the fact that the same person who

is said to "work not" is designated "ungodly." Finally, seeing that the

faith which belongs to justification is here said to be "counted for

(or "unto") righteousness," it is clear that the person to whom

"righteousness" is imputed, is destitute of righteousness in himself.

A parallel passage to the one which has just been before us is found in

Isaiah 43. There we hear God saying, "I, even I, am He that blotteth

out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy

sins" (v. 25). And to whom does God say this? To those who had

sincerely endeavoured to please Him? To those who, though they had

occasionally been overtaken in a fault, had, in the main, served Him

faithfully? No, indeed; very far from it. Instead, in the immediate

context we find Him saying to them, "But thou hast not called upon Me,

O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of Me, O Israel. Thou hast bought Me

no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled Me with the fat of

thy sacrifices: but thou hast made Me to serve with thy sins, thou hast

wearied Me with thine iniquities" (vv. 22, 24). They were, then,

thoroughly "ungodly"; yet to them the Lord declared, "I, even I, am He

that blotteth out thy transgressions"--why? Because of something good

in them or from them? No, "for Mine own sake"!

Further confirmation of what has been before us in Romans 4:5 is found

in both what immediately precedes and what follows. In verses 1-3 the

case of Abraham is considered, and the proof given that he was not

"justified by works," but on the ground of righteousness being imputed

to him on his believing. "Now if a person of such victorious faith,

exalted piety, and amazing obedience as his was, did not obtain

acceptance with God on account of his own duties, but by an imputed

righteousness; who shall pretend to an interest in the heavenly

blessing, in virtue of his own sincere endeavors, or pious

performances?--performances not fit to be named, in comparison with

those that adorned the conduct and character of Jehovah's friend" (A.

Booth).

Having shown that the father of all believers was regarded by the Lord

as an "ungodly" person, having no good works to his credit at the

moment of his justification, the Apostle next cited David's description

of the truly blessed man. "And how does the royal Psalmist describe

him? To what does he attribute his acceptance with God? To an inherent,

or to an imputed righteousness? Does he represent him as attaining the

happy state, and as enjoying the precious privilege, in consequence of

performing sincere obedience, and of keeping the law to the best of his

power? No such thing. His words are, Blessed are they whose iniquities

are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom

the Lord will not impute sin' (vv. 7-9). The blessed man is here

described as one who is, in himself, a polluted creature, and a guilty

criminal. As one who, before grace made the difference, was on a level

with the rest of mankind; equally unworthy, and equally wretched: and

the sacred penman informs us that all his blessedness arises from an

imputed righteousness" (A. Booth).

"Him that justifieth the ungodly." Here is the very heart of the

Gospel. Many have argued that God can only pronounce just, and treat as

such, those who are inherently righteous; but if this was so, what good

news would there be for sinful men? Enemies of the Truth insist that

for God to pronounce just those whom His law condemns would be a

judicial fiction. But Romans 4:5 makes known a Divine miracle:

something only God could have achieved. The miracle announced by the

Gospel is that God comes to the ungodly with a mercy that is righteous,

and in spite of all their depravity and rebellion, enables them through

faith (on the ground of Christ's righteousness) to enter into a new and

blessed relation with Himself.

The Scriptures speak of mercy, but it is not mercy coming in to make up

the deficiencies and forgive the slips of the virtuous, but mercy

extended through Christ to the chief of sinners. The Gospel which

proclaims mercy through the atonement of the Lord Jesus is

distinguished from every religious system of man, by holding out

salvation to the guiltiest of the human race, through faith in the

blood of the Redeemer. God's Son came into this world not only to save

sinners, but even the chief of sinners, the worst of His enemies. Mercy

is extended freely to the most violent and determined rebel. Here, and

here only, is a refuge for the guilty. Is the trembling reader

conscious that he is agreat sinner, then that is the very reason why

you should come to Christ: the greater your sins, the greater your need

of the Saviour.

There are some who appear to think that Christ is a Physician who can

cure only such patients as are not dangerously ill, that there are some

cases so desperate as to be incurable, beyond His skill. What an

affront to His power, what a denial of His sufficiency! Where can a

more extreme case be found than that of the thief on the cross? He was

at the very point of death, on the very brink of Hell! A guilty

criminal, an incorrigible outlaw, justly condemned even by men. He had

reviled the Saviour suffering by his side. Yet, at the end, he turned

to Him and said, "Lord remember me." Was his plea refused? Did the

Physician of souls regard his as a hopeless case? No, blessed be His

name, He at once responded "Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."

Only unbelief shuts the vilest out of Heaven.

"Him that justifieth the ungodly." And how can the thrice holy God

righteously do such a thing? Because "Christ died for the UNGODLY"

(Rom. 5:6). God's righteous grace comes to us through the

law-honouring, justice-satisfying, sin-atoning Work of the Lord Jesus!

Here, then, is the very essence of the Gospel: the proclamation of

God's amazing grace, the declaration of Divine bounty, altogether

irrespective of human worth or merit. In the great Satisfaction of His

Son, God has "brought nearHIS righteousness" (Isa. 46:13). "We do not

need to go up to Heaven for it; that would imply Christ had never come

down. Nor do we need to go down to the depths of the earth for it; that

would say Christ had never been buried and had never risen. It is near.

We do not need to exert ourselves to bring it near, nor do anything to

attract it towards us. It is near... The office of faith is not to

work, but to cease working; not to do anything, but to own that all is

done" (A. Bonar).

Faith is the one link between the sinner and the Saviour. Not faith as

a work, which must be properly performed to qualify us for pardon. Not

faith as a religious duty, which must be gone through according to

certain rules in order to induce Christ to give us the benefits of His

finished work. No, but faith simply extended as an empty hand, to

receive everything from Christ for nothing. Reader, you may be the very

"chief of sinners," yet is your case not hopeless. You may have sinned

against much light, great privileges, exceptional opportunities; you

may have broken every one of the Ten Commandments in thought, word and

deed; your body may be filled with disease from wickedness, your head

white with the winter of old age; you may already have one foot in

Hell; and yet even now, if you but take your place alongside of the

dying thief, and trust in the Divine efficacy of the precious blood of

the Lamb, you shall be plucked as a brand from the burning. God

"justifieth the ungodly." Hallelujah! If He did not, the writer had

been in Hell long ago.

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8. Its Instrument

"Being justified freely by His grace" (Rom. 3:24); "being now justified

by His blood" (Rom. 5:9); "being now justified by faith" (Rom. 5:1). A

full exposition of the doctrine of justification requires that each of

these propositions should be interpreted in their Scriptural sense, and

that they be combined together in their true relations as to form one

harmonious whole. Unless these three propositions be carefully

distinguished there is sure to be confusion; unless all the three are

steadily borne in mind we are sure to land in error. Each must be given

its due weight, yet none must be understood in such a way as to make

its force annul that of the others. Nor is this by any means a simple

task, in fact none but a real teacher (that is, a spiritual theologian)

who has devoted a lifetime to the undivided study of Scriptures is

qualified for it.

"The righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ" (Rom.

3:22); "A man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom.

3:28); "even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be

justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law"

(Gal. 2:16). What is the precise place and influence which faith has in

the important affairs of justification? What is the exact nature or

character of justifying faith? In what particular sense are we to

understand this proposition that we are "justified by faith"? and what

is the connection between that proposition and the postulates that we

are "justified by grace" and "justified by Christ's blood"? These are

matters which call for the utmost care. The nature of justifying faith

requires to be closely defined so that its particular agency is

correctly viewed, for it is easy to make a mistake here to the

prejudice of Christ's honour and glory, which must not be given to

another--no, not to faith itself.

Many would-be teachers have erred at this point, for the common

tendency of human nature is to arrogate to itself the glory which

belongs alone to God. While there have been those who rejected the

unscriptural notion that we can be justified before God by our own

works, yet not a few of these very men virtually make a saviour of

their own faith. Not only have some spoken of faith as though it were a

contribution which God requires the sinner to make toward his own

salvation--the last mite which was necessary to make up the price of

his redemption; but others (who sneered at theologians and boasted of

their superior understanding of the things of God) have insisted that

faith itself is what constitutes us righteous before God, He regarding

faith as righteousness.

A deplorable example of what we have just mentioned is to be found in

the comments made upon Romans 4 by Mr. J.N. Darby, the father of the

Plymouth Brethren: "This was Abraham's faith. He believed the promise

that he should be the father of many nations, because God had spoken,

counting on the power of God, thus glorifying Him, without calling in

question anything that He had said by looking at circumstances;

therefore this also was counted to him for righteousness. He glorified

God according to what God was. Now this was not written for his sake

alone: the same faith shall be imputed to us also for righteousness"

("Synopsis" vol. 4, p. 133--italics ours). The Christ-dishonouring

error contained in those statements will be exposed later on in this

chapter.

"How doth faith justify a sinner in the sight of God? Answer: Faith

justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of those other

graces which do always accompany it, nor of good works that are the

fruits of it, nor as if the grace of faith, or any act thereof, were

imputed to him for justification; but only as it is an instrument by

which he receiveth and applieth Christ and His righteousness"

(Westminster Confession of Faith). Though this definition was framed

upwards of two hundred and fifty years ago, it is far superior to

almost anything found in current literature on the subject. It is more

accurate to speak of faith as the "instrument" rather than as the

condition, for a "condition" is generally used to signify that for the

sake whereof a benefit is conferred. Faith is neither the ground nor

the substance of our justification, but simply the hand which receives

the Divine gift proffered to us in the Gospel.

What is the precise place and influence which faith has in the

important affair of justification? Romanist answer, It justifies us

formally, not relatively: that is, upon the account of its own

intrinsic value. They point out that faith is never alone, but "worketh

by love" (Gal 5:6), and therefore its own excellency merits acceptance

at God's hand. But the faith of the best is weak and deficient (Luke

17:5), and so could never satisfy the law, which requires a flawless

perfection. If righteousness was given as a reward for faith, its

possessor would have cause for boasting, expressly contrary to the

Apostle in Romans 3:26, 27. Moreover, such a method of justification

would entirely frustrate the life and death of Christ, making His great

sacrifice unnecessary. It is not faith as a spiritual grace which

justifies us, but as an instrument--the hand which lays hold of Christ.

In connection with justification, faith is not to be considered as a

virtuous exercise of the heart, nor as a principle of holy obedience:

"Because faith, as concerned in our justification, does not regard

Christ as King, enacting laws, requiring obedience, and subduing

depravity; but as a Substitute, answering the requirements of the

Divine Law, and as a Priest expiating sin by His own death on the

cross. Hence, in justification we read of precious faith... through the

righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ' (2 Peter 1:1) and of

faith in His blood' (Rom. 3:25), and believers are described as

receiving the atonement' and receiving the gift of righteousness' (Rom.

5:11, 17). Therefore it is evident that faith is represented as having

an immediate regard to the vicarious work of Christ, and that it is

considered not under the notion of exercising virtue or of performing a

duty, but of receiving a free gift" (A. Booth).

What is the relation of faith to justification? The Arminian answer to

the question, refined somewhat by the Plymouth Brethren, is, that the

act of believing is imputed to us for righteousness. One error leads to

another. Mr. Darby denied that Gentiles were ever under the law, hence

he denied also that Christ obeyed the law in His people's stead, and

therefore as Christ's vicarious obedience is not reckoned to their

account, he had to seek elsewhere for their righteousness. This he

claimed to find in the Christian's own faith, insisting that their act

of believing is imputed to them "for righteousness." To give his theory

respectability, he clothed it in the language of several expressions

found in Romans 4, though he knew quite well that the Greek afforded no

foundation whatever for that which he built upon it.

In Romans 4 we read "his faith is counted for righteousness" (v. 5),

"faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness" (v. 9), "it was

imputed to him for righteousness" (v. 22). Now in each of these verses

the Greek preposition is "eis" which never means "in the stead of," but

always signifies "towards, in order to, with a view to": it has the

uniform force of "unto." Its exact meaning and force is unequivocally

plain in Romans 10:10, "with the heart man believeth unto ("eis")

righteousness": that is, the believing heart reaches out toward and

lays hold of Christ Himself. "This passage (Rom. 10:10) may help us to

understand what justification by faith is, for it shows that

righteousness there comes to us when we embrace God's goodness offered

to us in the Gospel. We are then, for this reason, made just: because

we believe that God is propitious to us through Christ" (J. Calvin).

The Holy Spirit has used the Greek prepositions with unerring

precision. Never do we find Him employing "eis" in connection with

Christ's satisfaction and sacrifice in our room and stead, but only

"anti" or "huper," which means in lieu of. On the other hand, "anti"

and "huper" are never used in connection with our believing, for faith

is not accepted by God in lieu of perfect obedience. Faith must either

be the ground of our acceptance with God, or the means or instrument of

our becoming interested in the true meritorious ground, namely, the

righteousness of Christ; it cannot stand in both relations to our

justification. "God justifieth, not by imputing faith itself, the act

of believing, but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ"

(Westminster Catechism).

That faith itself cannot be the substance or ground of our

justification is clear from many considerations. The "righteousness of

God (i.e., the satisfaction which Christ rendered to the law) is

revealed to faith" (Rom. 1:17) and so cannot be faith itself. Romans

10:10 declares "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness" so

that righteousness must be a distinct thing from believing. In Jeremiah

23:6 we read "The LORD our righteousness," so faith cannot be our

righteousness. Let not Christ be dethroned in order to exalt faith: set

not the servant above the master. "We acknowledge no righteousness but

what the obedience and satisfaction of Christ yields us: His blood, not

our faith; His satisfaction, not our believing it, is the matter of

justification before God" (J. Flavel). What alterations are there in

our faith! what minglings of unbelief at all times! Is this a

foundation to build our justification and hope upon?

Perhaps some will say, Are not the words of Scripture expressly on Mr.

Darby's side? Does not Romans 4:5 affirm "faith is counted for

righteousness"? We answer, Is the sense of Scripture on his side?

Suppose I should undertake to prove that David was cleansed from guilt

by the "hyssop" which grows on the wall: that would sound ridiculous.

Yes; nevertheless, I should have the express words of Scripture to

support me: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean" (Psa. 51:7).

Yet clear as those words read, they would not afford me the least

countenance imaginable from the sense and spirit of God's Word. Has the

hyssop--a worthless shrub--any kind of fitness to stand in the stead of

the sacrificial blood, and make an atonement for sin? No more fitness

has faith to stand in the stead of Christ's perfect obedience, to act

as our justifying righteousness, or procure our acceptance with God!

An apology is really due many of our readers, for wasting their time

with such puerilities, but we ask them to kindly bear with us. We hope

it may please God to use this article to expose one of Darby's many

grievous errors. For "grievous" this error most certainly is. His

teaching that the Christian's faith, instead of the vicarious obedience

of Christ, is reckoned for righteousness (Mr. W. Kelly, his chief

lieutenant, wrote "his [Abraham's] faith in God's word as that which he

exercised and which was accounted as righteousness"--see [1]article 5)

makes God guilty of a downright lie, for it represents Him as giving to

faith a fictitious value--the believer has no righteousness, so God

regards his poor faith as "righteousness."

"And he believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for

righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). The one point to be decided here is: was it

Abraham's faith itself which was in God's account taken for

righteousness (horrible idea!), or, was it the righteousness of God in

Christ which Abraham's faith prospectively laid hold of? The comments

of the Apostle in Romans 4:18-22 settle the point decisively. In these

verses Paul emphasizes the natural impossibilities which stood in the

way of God's promise of a numerous offspring to Abraham being fulfilled

(the genital deadness both of his own body and Sarah's), and on the

implicit confidence he had (notwithstanding the difficulties) in the

power and faithfulness of God that He would perform what He promised.

Hence, when the Apostle adds, "Therefore it was imputed to him for

righteousness" (v. 22), that "therefore" can only mean: Because through

faith he completely lost sight of nature and self, and realized with

undoubting assurance the sufficiency of the Divine arm, and the

certainty of its working.

Abraham's faith, dear reader, was nothing more and nothing else than

the renunciation of all virtue and strength in himself, and a hanging

in childlike trust upon God for what He was able and willing to do.

Far, very far, indeed, was his faith from being a mere substitute for a

"righteousness" which he lacked. Far, very far was God from accepting

his faith in lieu of a perfect obedience to His Law. Rather was

Abraham's faith the acting of a soul which found its life, its hope,

its all in the Lord Himself. And that is what justifying faith is: it

is "simply the instrument by which Christ and His righteousness are

received in order to justification. It is emptiness filled with

Christ's fulness; impotency lying down upon Christ's strength" (J.L.

Girardeau).

"The best obedience of my hands

Dares not appear before Thy throne;

But faith can answer Thy demands,

By pleading what my Lord has done."

What is the relation of faith to justification? Antinomians and

hyper-Calvinists answer, Merely that of comfort or assurance. Their

theory is that the elect were actually justified by God before the

foundation of the world, and all that faith does now is to make this

manifest in their conscience. This error was advocated by such men as

W. Gadsby, J. Irons, James Wells, J.C. Philpot. That it originated not

with these men is clear from the fact that the Puritans refuted it in

their day. "By faith alone we obtain and receive the forgiveness of

sins; for notwithstanding any antecedent act of God concerning us in

and for Christ, we do not actually receive a complete soul-freeing

discharge until we believe" (J. Owen). "It is vain to say I am

justified only in respect to the court of mine own conscience. The

faith that Paul and the other Apostles were justified by, was their

believing on Christ that they might be justified (Gal. 2:15, 16), and

not a believing they were justified already; and therefore it was not

an act of assurance" (T. Goodwin, vol. 8).

How are we justified by faith? Having given a threefold negative

answer: not by faith as a joint cause with works (Romanists), not by

faith as an act of grace in us (Arminians), not by faith as it receives

the Spirit's witness (Antinomians); we now turn to the positive answer.

Faith justifies only as an instrument which God has appointed to the

apprehension and application of Christ's righteousness. When we say

that faith is the "instrument" of our justification, let it be clearly

understood that we do not mean faith is the instrument wherewith God

justifies, but the instrument whereby we receive Christ. Christ has

merited righteousness for us, and faith in Christ is that which renders

it meet in God's sight the purchased blessing be assigned. Faith unites

to Christ, and being united to Him we are possessed of all that is in

Christ, so far as is consistent with our capacity of receiving and

God's appointment in giving. Having been made one with Christ in

spirit, God now considers us as one with Him in law.

We are justified by faith, and not for faith; not because of what faith

is, but because of what it receives. "It hath no efficacy of itself,

but as it is the band of our union with Christ. The whole virtue of

cleansing proceeds from Christ the object. We receive the water with

our hands, but the cleansing virtue is not in our hands, but in the

water, yet the water cannot cleanse us without our receiving it; our

receiving it unites the water to us, and is a means whereby we are

cleansed. And therefore is it observed that our justification by faith

is always expressed in the passive, not in the active: we are justified

by faith, not that faithjustifies us. The efficacy is in Christ's

blood; the reception of it is in our faith" (S. Charnock).

Scripture knows no such thing as a justified unbeliever. There is

nothing meritorious about believing, yet it is necessary in order to

justification. It is not only the righteousness of Christ as imputed

which justifies, but also as received (Rom. 5:11, 17). The

righteousness of Christ is not mine until I accept it as the Father's

gift. "The believing sinner is justified by faith' only instrumentally,

as he lives by eating' only instrumentally. Eating is the particular

act by which he receives and appropriates food. Strictly speaking, he

lives by bread alone, not by eating, or the act of masticating. And,

strictly speaking, the sinner is justified by Christ's sacrifice alone,

not by his act of believing in it" (W. Shedd). In the application of

justification faith is not a builder, but a beholder; not an agent, but

an instrument; it has nothing to do, but all to believe; nothing to

give, but all to receive.

God has not selected faith to be the instrument of justification

because there is some peculiar virtue in faith, but rather because

there is no merit in it: faith is self-emptying--"Therefore it is of

faith that it might be by grace" (Rom. 4:16). A gift is seen to be a

gift when nothing is required or accepted of the recipient, but simply

that he receive it. Whatever other properties faith may possess, it is

simply as receiving Christ that it justifies. Were we said to be

justified by repentance, by love, or by any other spiritual grace, it

would convey the idea of something good in us being the consideration

on which the blessing was bestowed; but justification by faith

(correctly understood) conveys no such idea.

"Faith justifies in no other way than as it introduces us into a

participation of the righteousness of Christ" (J. Calvin). Justifying

faith is a looking away from self, a renouncing of my own

righteousness, a laying hold of Christ. Justifying faith consists,

first, of a knowledge and belief of the truth revealed in Scripture

thereon; second, in an abandonment of all pretense, claim or confidence

in our own righteousness; third, in a trust in and reliance upon the

righteousness of Christ, laying hold of the blessing which He purchased

for us. It is the heart's approval and approbation of the method of

justification proposed in the Gospel: by Christ alone, proceeding from

the pure grace of God, and excluding all human merits. "In the LORD

have I righteousness and strength" (Isa. 45:24).

None will experimentally appreciate the righteousness of Christ until

they have been experimentally stripped by the Spirit. Not until the

Lord puts us in the fire and burns off our filthy rags, and makes us

stand naked before Him, trembling from head to foot as we view the

sword of His justice suspended over our heads, will any truly value

"the best robe." Not until the condemning sentence of the law has been

applied by the Spirit to the conscience does the guilty soul cry,

"Lost, lost!" (Rom. 7:9, 10). Not until there is a personal

apprehension of the requirements of God's Law, a feeling sense of our

total inability to perform its righteous demands, and an honest

realization that God would be just in banishing us from His presence

forever, is the necessity for a precious Christ perceived by the soul.

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9. Its Evidence

In Romans 3:28 the Apostle Paul declared "that a man is justified by

faith without the deeds of the law," and then produces the case of

Abraham to prove his assertion. But the Apostle James, from the case of

the same Abraham, draws quite another conclusion, saying, "Ye see then

how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James

2:24). This is one of the "contradictions in the Bible" to which

infidels appeal in support of their unbelief. But the Christian,

however difficult he finds it to harmonize passages apparently

opposite, knows there cannot be any contradiction in the Word of God.

Faith has unshaken confidence in the inerrancy of Holy Writ. Faith is

humble too and prays, "That which I see not teach Thou me" (Job.

34:32). Nor is faith lazy; it prompts its possessor unto a reverent

examination and diligent investigation of that which puzzles and

perplexes, seeking to discover the subject of each separate book, the

scope of each writer, the connections of each passage.

Now the design of the Apostle Paul in Romans 3:28 may be clearly

perceived from its context. He is treating of the great matter of a

sinner's justification before God: he shows that it cannot be by works

of the law, because by the law all men are condemned, and also because

if men were justified on the ground of their own doings, then boasting

could not be excluded. Positively he affirms that justification is by

grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. His reasoning

will appear the more conclusive if the whole passage (Rom. 3:19-28) be

read attentively. Because the Jews had a high regard of Abraham, the

Apostle proceeded to show in the 4th chapter of Romans that Abraham was

justified in that very way--apart from any works of his own, by faith

alone. By such a method of justification the pride of the creature is

strained, and the grace of God is magnified.

Now the scope of the Apostle James is very different: his Epistle was

written to counteract quite another error. Fallen men are creatures of

extremes: no sooner are they driven out of the false refuge of trusting

to their own righteousness, than they fly to the opposite and no less

dangerous error of supposing that, since they cannot be justified by

their own works, that there is no necessity whatever for good works,

and no danger from ungodly living and unholy practice. It is very clear

from the New Testament itself that very soon after the Gospel was

freely proclaimed, there arose many who turned the grace of God into

"lasciviousness": that this was not only quickly espoused in theory,

but soon had free course in practice. It was therefore the chief design

of the Apostle James to show the great wickedness and awful danger of

unholy practice and to assert the imperative necessity of good works.

The Apostle James devoted much of his Epistle to the exposing of any

empty profession. In his second chapter, particularly, he addresses

himself unto those who rested in a notion which they called "faith,"

accounting an intellectual assent to the truth of the Gospel sufficient

for their salvation, though it had no spiritual influence upon their

hearts, tempers, or conduct. The Apostle shows their hope was a vain

one, and that their"faith" was not a whit superior to that possessed by

the demons. From the example of Abraham he proves that justifying faith

is a very different thing from the "faith" of empty professors, because

it enabled him to perform the hardest and most painful act of

obedience, even the offering up of his only son upon the altar; which

act took place many years after he had been justified by God, and which

act manifested the reality and nature of his faith.

From what has been said above, it should be very evident that the

"justification" of which Paul treats is entirely different from the

"justification" with which James deals. The doctrine of the former is

that nothing renders any sinner acceptable to God but faith in the Lord

Jesus Christ; the doctrine of the latter is that such a faith is not

solitary, but accompanied with every good work, and that where good

works are absent, justifying faith cannot exist. James is insistent

that it is not enough to say I have justifying faith, I must give proof

of the same by exhibiting those fruits which love toward God and love

toward men necessarily produce. Paul writes of our justification before

God, James of our justification before men. Paul treats of the

justification of persons; James, of the justification of our

profession. The one is by faith alone; the other is by a faith which

worketh by love and produces obedience.

Now it is of first importance that the above-mentioned distinctions

should be clearly grasped. When Christian theologians affirm that the

sinner is justified by faith alone, they do not mean that faith exists

alone in the person justified, for justifying faith is always

accompanied by all the other graces which the Spirit imparts at our

regeneration; nor do they mean that nothing else is required in order

to our receiving forgiveness from God, for He requires repentance and

conversion as well as faith (Acts 3:19). No, rather do they mean that

there is nothing else in sinners themselves to which their

justification is in Scripture ascribed: nothing else is required of

them or exists in them which stands in the same relation to

justification as their faith does, or which exerts any casual influence

or any efficacy of instrumentality in producing the result of their

being justified (Condensed from Cunningham).

On the other hand, that faith which justifies is not an idle and

inoperative principle, but one that purifies the heart (Acts 15:9) and

works by love (Gal. 5:6). It is faith which can easily be distinguished

from that mental faith of the empty professor. It is this which the

Apostle James insists so emphatically upon. The subject of this Epistle

is not salvation by grace and justification by faith, but the testing

of those who claim to have faith. His design is not to show the ground

on which sinners are accepted before God, but to make known that which

evidences a sinner's having been justified. He insists that the tree is

known by its fruits, that a righteous person is one who walks in the

paths of righteousness. He declares that the man who is not a doer of

the Word, but a "hearer only," is self-deceived, deluded. When God

justifies a man, He sanctifies him too: the two blessings are

inseparable, never found apart.

Unless the subject and scope of James' Epistle be clearly seen, the

apprehension of many of its statements can only issue in

God-dishonouring, grace-repudiating, soul-destroying error. To this

portion of the Word of God, more than any other, have legalists

appealed in their opposition to the grand truth of justification by

grace, through faith, without works. To the declarations of this

Epistle have they turned to find support for their Christ-insulting,

man-exalting, Gospel-repudiating error of justification by human works.

Merit-mongers of all descriptions cite James 2 for the purpose of

setting aside all that is taught elsewhere in Scripture on the subject

of justification. Romanists, and their half-brothers the Arminians,

quote "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by

faith only" (v. 24), and suppose that ends all argument.

We propose now to take up James 2:14-26 and offer a few comments

thereon. "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath

faith, and have not works? can faith save him?" (v. 14). Observe

carefully that the Apostle does not here ask, "What doth it profit a

man though he hath faith and have not works?"--such a supposition is

nowhere countenanced by the Word of God: it were to suppose the

impossibility for wherever real faith exists, good works necessarily

follow. No, instead he asks, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though

a man (not "one of you"!) say he hath faith"? Professing to be a

Christian when a man is not one, may secure a standing among men,

improve his moral and social prestige, obtain membership in a "church,"

and promote his commercial interests; but can it save his soul?

It is not that those empty professors who call themselves Christians

are all (though many probably are) conscious hypocrites, rather are

they deceived souls, and the tragic thing is that in most places there

is nothing in the preaching which is at all calculated to un-deceive

them; instead, there is only that which bolsters them up in their

delusion. There is a large class in Christendom today who are satisfied

with a bare profession. They have heard expounded some of the

fundamentals of the Christian faith, and have given an intellectual

assent thereto, and they mistake that for a saving knowledge of the

Truth. Their minds are instructed, but their hearts are not reached,

nor their lives transformed. They are still worldly in their affections

and ways. There is no real subjection to God, no holiness of walk, no

fruit to Christ's glory. Their "faith" is of no value at all; their

profession is vain.

"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and

have not works? Can faith save him?" By noting the emphasis upon the

word "say," we perceive at once that James is arguing against those who

substituted a theoretical belief of the Gospel for the whole of

evangelical religion, and who replied to all exhortations and reproofs

by saying, "We are not justified by our works, but by faith alone." He

therefore begins by asking what profit is there in professing to be a

believer, when a man is devoid of true piety? The answer is, none

whatever. To merely say I have faith when I am unable to appeal to any

good works and spiritual fruits as the evidence of it, profits neither

the speaker nor those who listen to his empty talk. Ability to prate in

an orthodox manner about the doctrines of Christianity is a vastly

different thing from justifying faith.

"If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one

of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled;

notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the

body; what doth it profit?" (vv. 15, 16). Here the Apostle shows by an

opposite illustration the utter worthlessness of fair talking which is

unaccompanied by practical deeds: notice the "say unto them, depart in

peace" etc. What is the use and value of feigning to be charitable when

the works of charity are withheld? None whatever: empty bellies are not

filled by benevolent words, nor are naked backs clothed by good wishes.

Nor is the soul saved by a bare profession of the Gospel.

"Faith worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6). The first "fruit of the spirit,"

that is of the new nature in the regenerated soul, is "love" (Gal.

5:22). When faith has truly been wrought in the heart by the Holy

Spirit, that faith is manifested in love--love toward God, love toward

His commandments (John 14:23), love toward the brethren, love toward

our fellow-creatures. Therefore in testing the "faith" of the empty

professor, the Apostle at onceputs to the proof his love. In showing

the pretense of his love, he proves the worthlessness of his "faith."

"But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and

shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of

God in him?" (1 John 3:17)! Genuine love is operative; so is genuine

faith.

"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (James

2:17). Here the Apostle applies the illustration he has employed to the

case before him, proving the worthlessness of a lifeless and

inoperative "faith." Even our fellow-men would promptly denounce as

valueless a "love" which was gushing in words but lacking in works.

Unregenerate people are not deceived by those who talk benignly to the

indigent, but who refuse to minister unto their needs. And think you,

my reader, that the omniscient God is to be imposed upon by an empty

profession? Has He not said, "Why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not

the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).

That "faith" which is only of the lips and is not confirmed by evidence

in the life, is useless. No matter how clear and sound may be my

head-knowledge of the Truth, no matter how good a talker upon Divine

things I am, if my walk is not controlled by the precepts of God, then

I am but "sounding brass and a tinkling symbol." "Faith, if it hath not

works, is dead, being alone." It is not a living and fruitful faith,

like the faith of God's elect, but a thing which is utterly worthless--

"dead." It is "alone," that is, divorced from love to God and men and

every holy affection. How could our holy Lord approve of such a

"faith"! As works without faith are "dead" (Heb. 9:14), so a "faith"

which is without "works" is a dead one.

"Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy

faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works"

(James 2:18). Here the true Christian challenges the empty professor:

You claim to be a believer, but disgrace the name of Christ by your

worldly walk, so do not expect the real saints to regard you as a

brother till you display your faith in the good works of a holy life.

The emphatic word in this verse is "show"--proof is demanded:

demonstrate your faith to be genuine. Actions speak louder than words:

unless our profession can endure that test it is worthless. Only true

holiness of heart and life vindicates a profession of being justified

by faith.

"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also

believe, and tremble" (v. 19). Here the Apostle anticipates an

objection: I do actually believe in the Lord! Very well, so also do the

demons, but what is the fruit of their "believing"? Does it influence

their hearts and lives, does it transform their conduct Godward and

manward? It does not. Then what is their "believing" worth! "But wilt

thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" (v. 20):

"vain" signifies "empty," exposing the hollowness of one who claims to

be justified by faith yet lacks the evidence of an obedient walk.

"Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered

Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his

works, and by works was faith made perfect?" (vv. 21, 22). The faith

which reposes on Christ is not an idle, but an active and fruitful

principle. Abraham had been justified many years before (Gen. 15:6);

the offering up of Isaac (Gen. 22) was the open attestation of his

faith and the manifestation of the sincerity of his profession. "By

works was faith made perfect" means, in actual obedience it reaches its

designed end, the purpose for which it was given is realized. "Made

perfect" also signifies revealed or made known (see 2 Cor. 10:9).

"And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and

it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend

of God" (James 2:23). The "Scripture" here is God's testimony to

Abraham in Genesis 15:6: that testimony was "fulfilled" or verified

when Abraham gave the supreme demonstration of his obedience to God.

Our being informed here that Abraham was "called the Friend of God" is

in beautiful accord with the tenor of the whole of this passage, as is

clear from a comparison with John 15:14: "Ye are my friends,if ye do

whatsoever I command you."

"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith

only" (James 2:24). In the "ye see then" the Apostle draws his

"conclusion" from the foregoing. It is by "works," by acts of implicit

obedience to the Divine command, such as Abraham exercised--and not by

a mere "faith" of the brain and the lips--that we justify our

profession of being believers, that we prove our right to be regarded

as Christians.

"Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she

had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?" (v.

25). Why bring in the case of Rahab? Was not the example of Abraham

conclusive and sufficient? First, because "two witnesses" are required

for the truth to be "established"--cf. Romans 4:3, 6. Second, because,

it might be objected Abraham's case was so exceptional that it could be

no criterion to measure others by. Very well: Rahab was a poor Gentile,

a heathen, a harlot; yet she too was justified by faith (Heb. 11:31),

and later demonstrated her faith by "works"--receiving the spies at the

imminent risk of her own life.

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is

dead also" (James 2:26). Here is the summing up: a breathless carcass

and a worthless faith are alike useless as unto all the ends of natural

and spiritual life. Thus the Apostle has conclusively shown the

worthlessness of the garb of orthodoxy when worn by lifeless

professors. He has fully exposed the error of those who rest in a bare

profession of the Gospel--as if that could save them, when the temper

of their minds and the tenor of their lives was diametrically opposed

to the holy religion they professed. A holy heart and an obedient walk

are the scriptural evidence of our having been justified by God.

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10. Its Results

The justification of the believer is absolute, complete, final. "It is

God that justifieth" (Rom. 8:33), and "I know that, whatsoever God

doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing

taken from it" (Eccl. 3:14). So absolute and inexorable is this blessed

fact that, in Romans 8:30 we are told, "Whom He justified, them He also

glorified": notice it is not simply a promise that God "will glorify,"

but so sure and certain is that blissful event, the past tense is used.

"Them He also glorified" is speaking from the standpoint of the eternal

and unalterable purpose of God, concerning which there is no

conditionality or contingency whatsoever. To be "glorified" is to be

perfectly conformed to the lovely image of Christ, when we shall see

Him as He is and be made like Him (1 John 3:2). Because God has

determined this, He speaks of it as already accomplished, for He

"calleth those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:17).

So far as the believer is concerned, the penal side of the sin question

has been settled once and for all. His case has been tried in the

supreme court, and God has justified him: in consequence thereof the

Divine decision is "There is therefore now no condemnation to them

which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Once those very persons were

under condemnation--"condemned already" (John 3:18); but now that their

faith has united them to Christ there is no condemnation. The debt of

their sin has been paid by their great Surety; the record thereof has

been "blotted out" by His cleansing blood. "It is God that justifieth.

Who is he that condemneth" (Rom. 8:33, 34). Who will reverse His

decision! Where is that superior tribunal to which this cause can be

carried? Eternal justice has pronounced her fiat; immutable judgment

has recorded her sentence.

It is utterly and absolutely impossible that the sentence of the Divine

Judge should ever be revoked or reversed. His sentence of justification

results from and rests upon a complete satisfaction having been offered

to His Law, and that in the fulfillment of a covenant engagement. Thus

is effectually precluded the recall of the verdict. The Father

stipulated to release His elect from the curse of the law provided the

Son would meet the claims of justice against them. The Son freely

complied with His Father's will: "Lo, I come." He was now made under

the law, fulfilled the law, and suffered the full penalty of the law;

therefore shall He see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.

Sooner shall the lightenings of omnipotence shiver the Rock of Ages

than those sheltering in Him again be brought under condemnation.

How very, very far from the glorious truth of the Gospel is the mere

conditional pardon which Arminians represent God as bestowing upon

those who come to Christ--a pardon which may be rescinded, yea, which

will be canceled, unless they "do their part" and perform certain

stipulations! What a horrible and blasphemous travesty of the Truth is

that!--an error which must be steadfastly resisted no matter who holds

it: better far to hurt the feelings of a million of our

fellow-creatures than to displease their august Creator. On no such

precarious basis as our fulfilling certain conditions has God suspended

the justification of His people. Not only is there "now no

condemnation" resting upon the believer, but there never again shall

me, for "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (Rom.

4:8).

The dread sentence of the law, "Thou shalt surely die," cannot in

justice be executed upon the sinner's Surety and also upon himself.

Hence by a necessity existing in the very nature of moral government,

it must follow that the believing sinner be freed from all

condemnation, that is, so cleared of the same that he is raised above

all liability to punishment. So declared our blessed Saviour Himself,

in words too plain and emphatic to admit of any misunderstanding:

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth

on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into

condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). He, the

habitation of whose throne is "justice and judgment," has sealed up

this declaration forever, by affirming "I will never leave thee nor

forsake thee." Sooner shall the sword of justice cleave the helmet of

the Almighty than any Divinely pardoned soul perish.

But not only are the sins of all who truly come to Christ eternally

remitted, but the very righteousness of the Redeemer passes over to

them, is placed upon them, so that a perfect obedience to the law is

imputed to their account. It is theirs, not by promise, but by gift

(Rom. 5:17), by actual bestowment. It is not simply that God treats

them as if they were righteous, they are righteous and so pronounced by

Him. And therefore may each believing soul exclaim, "I will greatly

rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath

clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the

robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments,

and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels" (Isa. 61:10). O that

each Christian reader may be enabled to clearly and strongly grasp hold

of this glorious fact: that he is now truly righteous in the sight of

God, is in actual possession of an obedience which answers every demand

of the law.

This unspeakable blessing is bestowed not only by the amazing grace of

God, but it is actually required by His inexorable justice. This too

was stipulated and agreed upon in the covenant into which the Father

entered with the Son. That is why the Redeemer lived here on earth for

upwards of thirty years before He went to the cross to suffer the

penalty of our sins: He assumed and discharged our responsibilities; as

a child, as a youth, as a man, He rendered unto God that perfect

obedience which we owed Him. He "fulfilled all righteousness" (Matt.

3:15) for His people, and just as He who knew no sin was made sin for

them, so they are now made "the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor.

5:21). And therefore does Jehovah declare, "For the mountains shall

depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from

thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the LORD

that hath mercy on thee" (Isa. 54:10).

By actually believing with a justifying faith the sinner doth receive

Christ Himself, is joined to Him, and becomes immediately an heir of

God and joint-heir with Christ. This gives him a right unto and an

interest in the benefits of His mediation. By faith in Christ he

received not only the forgiveness of sins, but an inheritance among all

them that are sanctified (Acts 26:18), the Holy Spirit (given to him)

being "the earnest of our inheritance" (Eph. 1:13, 14). The believing

sinner may now say "in the LORD have I righteousness" (Isa. 45:24). He

is "complete in Him" (Col. 2:10), for by "one offering" the Saviour

hath "perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). The

believer has been "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6), and stands

before the throne of God arrayed in a garment more excellent than that

which is worn by the holy angels.

How infinitely does the glorious Gospel of God transcend the

impoverished thoughts and schemes of men! How immeasurably superior is

that "everlasting righteousness" which Christ has brought in (Dan.

9:24) from that miserable thing which multitudes are seeking to produce

by their own efforts. Greater far is the difference between the shining

light of the midday sun and the blackness of the darkest night, than

between that "best robe" (Luke 15:22) which Christ has wrought out for

each of His people and that wretched covering which zealous

religionists are attempting to weave out of the filthy rags of their

own righteousness. Equally great is the difference between the truth of

God concerning thepresent and immutable standing of His saints in all

the acceptability of Christ, and the horrible perversion of Arminians

who make acceptance with God contingent upon the believer's

faithfulness and perseverance, who suppose that Heaven can be purchased

by the creature's deeds and doings.

It is not that the justified soul is now left to himself, so that he is

certain of getting to Heaven no matter how he conducts himself--the

fatal error of Antinomians. No Indeed. God also imparts to him the

blessed Holy Spirit, who works within him the desire to serve, please,

and glorify the One who has been so gracious to Him. "The love of

Christ constraineth us... that they which live should not henceforth

live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again"

(2 Cor. 5:14, 15). They now "delight in the law of God after the inward

man" (Rom. 7:22), and though the flesh, the world, and the Devil oppose

every step of the way, occasioning many a sad fall--which is repented

of, confessed, and forsaken--nevertheless the Spirit renews them day by

day (2 Cor. 4:16) and leads them in the paths of righteousness for

Christ's name's sake.

In the last paragraph will be found the answer to those who object that

the preaching of justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ,

apprehended by faith alone, will encourage carelessness and foster

licentiousness. Those whom God justifies are not left in their natural

condition, under the dominion of sin, but are quickened, indwelt, and

guided by the Holy Spirit. As Christ cannot be divided, and so is

received as Lord to rule us as well as Saviour to redeem us, so those

whom God justifies He also sanctifies. We do not affirm that all who

receive this blessed truth into their heads have their lives

transformed thereby--no indeed; but we do insist that where it is

applied in power to the heart there always follows a walk to the glory

of God, the fruits of righteousness being brought forth to the praise

of His name. Each truly justified soul will say:

"Let worldly minds the world pursue,

It has no charms for me;

I once admired its trifles too,

But grace has set me free."

It is therefore the bounden duty of those who profess to have been

justified by God to diligently and impartially examine themselves, to

ascertain whether or not they have in them those spiritual graces which

always accompany justification. It is by our sanctification, and that

alone, that we may discover our justification. Would you know whether

Christ fulfilled the law for you, that His obedience has been imputed

to your account? Then search your heart and life and see whether a

spirit of obedience to Him is daily working in you. The righteousness

of the law is fulfilled only in those who "walk not after the flesh,

but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4). God never designed that the obedience

of His Son should be imputed to those who live a life of worldliness,

self-pleasing, and gratifying the lusts of the flesh. Far from it: "If

any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away;

behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

Summarizing now the blessed results of justification. 1. The sins of

the believer are forgiven. "Through this Man is preached unto you the

forgiveness of sins. And by Him all that believe are justified from all

things" (Acts 13:38, 39). All the sins of the believer, past, present,

and to come, were laid upon Christ and atoned for by Him. Although sins

cannot be actually pardoned before they are actually committed yet

their obligation unto the curse of the law were virtually remitted at

the Cross, antecedently to their actual commission. The sins of

Christians involve only the governmental dealings of God in this life,

and these are remitted upon a sincere repentance and confession.

2. An inalienable title unto everlasting glory is bestowed. Christ

purchased for His people the reward of blessing of the law, which is

eternal life. Therefore does the Holy Spirit assure the Christian that

he has been begotten "to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled,

and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:4).

Not only is that inheritance reserved for all the justified, but they

are all preserved unto it, as the very next verse declares, "who are

kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be

revealed in the last time" (v. 5)--"kept" from committing the

unpardonable sin, from apostatising from the truth, from being fatally

deceived by the Devil; so "kept" that the power of God prevents

anything separating them from His love in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:35-38).

3. Reconciliation unto God Himself. "Therefore being justified by

faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ... we were

reconciled to God by the death of His Son" (Rom. 5:1, 10). Until men

are justified they are at war with God, and He is against them, being

"angry with the wicked every day" (Psa. 7:11). Dreadful beyond words is

the condition of those who are under condemnation: their minds are

enmity against God (Rom. 8:7), all their ways are opposed to Him (Col.

1:21). But at conversion the sinner throws down the weapons of his

rebellion and surrenders to the righteous claims of Christ, and by Him

he is reconciled to God. Reconciliation is to make an end of strife, to

bring together those at variance, to change enemies into friends.

Between God and the justified there is peace--effected by the blood of

Christ.

4. An unalterable standing in the favour of God. "Therefore being

justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus

Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we

stand" (Rom. 5:1, 2). Mark the word "also": not only has Christ turned

away the wrath of God from us, but in addition He has secured the

benevolence of God toward us. Previous to justification our standing

was one of unutterable disgrace, but now, through Christ, it is in one

of unclouded grace. God now has naught but good-will toward us. God has

not only ceased to be offended at us, but is well-pleased with us; not

only will He never afflict punishment upon us, but He will never cease

to shower His blessings upon us. The throne to which we have free

access is not one of judgment, but of pure and unchanging grace.

5. Owned by God Himself before an assembled universe. "But I say unto

you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account

thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be

justified" (Matt. 12:36, 37): yes, justified publicly by the Judge

Himself! "These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the

righteous into life eternal" (Matt. 25:46). Here will be the final

justification of the Christian, this sentence being declaratory unto

the glory of God and the everlasting blessedness of those who have

believed.

Let it be said in conclusion that the justification of the Christian is

complete the moment he truly believes in Christ, and hence there are no

degrees in justification. The Apostle Paul was as truly a justified man

at the hour of his conversion as he was at the close of his life. The

feeblest babe in Christ is just as completely justified as is the most

mature saint. Let theologians note the following distinctions.

Christians were decretively justified from all eternity: efficaciously

so when Christ rose again from the dead; actually so when they

believed; sensibly so when the Spirit bestows joyous assurance;

manifestly so when they tread the path of obedience; finally so at the

Day of Judgment, when God shall sententiously, and in the presence of

all created things, pronounce them so.

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202. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=5&scrV=19#ch2-p18.3

203. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=5&scrV=19#ch5-p5.2

204. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=5&scrV=19#ch7-p7.4

205. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=7&scrV=9#ch8-p22.1

206. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=7&scrV=10#ch6-p7.2

207. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=7&scrV=10#ch8-p22.2

208. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=7&scrV=22#ch10-p10.3

209. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=7&scrV=24#ch1-p16.1

210. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=8&scrV=1#ch1-p16.2

211. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=8&scrV=1#ch7-p6.3

212. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=8&scrV=1#ch10-p2.1

213. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=8&scrV=4#ch10-p12.1

214. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=8&scrV=7#ch10-p15.4

215. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=8&scrV=30#ch2-p15.1

216. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=8&scrV=30#ch10-p1.3

217. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=8&scrV=33#ch2-p12.4

218. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=8&scrV=33#ch2-p14.19

219. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=8&scrV=33#ch7-p1.1

220. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=8&scrV=33#ch10-p1.1

221. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=8&scrV=33#ch10-p2.3

222. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=8&scrV=33#ch1-p16.3

223. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=8&scrV=34#ch2-p12.5

224. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=8&scrV=34#ch2-p14.20

225. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=8&scrV=34#ch10-p2.4

226. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=8&scrV=35#ch10-p14.3

227. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=9&scrV=0#ch1-p10.1

228. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=10&scrV=0#ch1-p10.2

229. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=10&scrV=3#ch4-p12.1

230. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=10&scrV=5#ch6-p7.1

231. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=10&scrV=10#ch8-p9.5

232. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=10&scrV=10#ch8-p9.6

233. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rom&scrCh=10&scrV=10#ch8-p11.2

234. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=1Cor&scrCh=1&scrV=30#ch5-p8.1

235. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=1Cor&scrCh=15&scrV=47#ch6-p3.2

236. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=2Cor&scrCh=4&scrV=16#ch10-p10.4

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319. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=1John&scrCh=3&scrV=2#ch10-p1.4

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325. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=Rev&scrCh=21&scrV=27#ch4-p1.1