The Doctrine of Justification

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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.

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 shortcomings 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.

Indexes

Index of Scripture References

Genesis

[2]15:6 [3]15:6 [4]15:6 [5]22 [6]44:16

Exodus

[7]34:7

Leviticus

[8]16:21 [9]16:22

Deuteronomy

[10]25:1 [11]25:1 [12]28:15-68

2 Samuel

[13]12:13

1 Kings

[14]8:31 [15]8:32

Job

[16]9:20 [17]25:4 [18]25:4 [19]32:2 [20]33:24 [21]33:26

[22]34:32 [23]42:6

Psalms

[24]7:11 [25]19:11 [26]40:7 [27]40:8 [28]51:4 [29]51:7

[30]69:5 [31]89:14 [32]89:19 [33]130:2 [34]130:3

[35]139:1-5 [36]139:7-11 [37]139:12 [38]143:2

Proverbs

[39]17:15 [40]17:15

Ecclesiastes

[41]3:14

Isaiah

[42]1:2-4 [43]1:6 [44]29:14 [45]43 [46]43:22 [47]43:24

[48]43:25 [49]43:25 [50]43:25 [51]45:21 [52]45:24 [53]45:24

[54]45:24 [55]45:25 [56]46:13 [57]48:8 [58]50:7 [59]50:8

[60]53:6 [61]53:6 [62]53:10 [63]53:11 [64]54:10 [65]61:10

[66]61:10 [67]64:6

Jeremiah

[68]9:24 [69]23:6 [70]23:6 [71]31:3

Daniel

[72]6 [73]9:24 [74]9:24 [75]9:24

Micah

[76]6:6 [77]6:7 [78]7:18

Zechariah

[79]3:2 [80]3:4 [81]13:7

Matthew

[82]3:15 [83]11:19 [84]12:36 [85]12:37 [86]12:37 [87]19:16

[88]19:17 [89]25:46 [90]26:28

Mark

[91]2:7

Luke

[92]6:46 [93]7:29 [94]15 [95]15:22 [96]17:5 [97]18:13

John

[98]3:18 [99]3:18 [100]5:24 [101]5:45 [102]8 [103]14:23

[104]15:14 [105]15:25 [106]17:2 [107]17:4 [108]17:24

Acts

[109]3:19 [110]13:38 [111]13:39 [112]13:39 [113]15:9

[114]20:28 [115]26:18 [116]26:18

Romans

[117]1:17 [118]1:17 [119]1:18 [120]1:32 [121]2:2 [122]2:6

[123]2:15 [124]3:4 [125]3:10 [126]3:12 [127]3:18 [128]3:19

[129]3:19 [130]3:19-28 [131]3:21 [132]3:22 [133]3:22

[134]3:22 [135]3:22 [136]3:23 [137]3:24 [138]3:24 [139]3:24

[140]3:24 [141]3:25 [142]3:25 [143]3:26 [144]3:26 [145]3:27

[146]3:28 [147]3:28 [148]3:28 [149]3:30 [150]4 [151]4

[152]4 [153]4 [154]4 [155]4:1-3 [156]4:3 [157]4:5

[158]4:5 [159]4:5 [160]4:5 [161]4:5 [162]4:5 [163]4:6

[164]4:6 [165]4:6-8 [166]4:6-8 [167]4:7-9 [168]4:8 [169]4:9

[170]4:13 [171]4:16 [172]4:17 [173]4:18-22 [174]4:22

[175]4:22 [176]4:25 [177]5:1 [178]5:1 [179]5:1 [180]5:1

[181]5:2 [182]5:6 [183]5:9 [184]5:9 [185]5:9 [186]5:9

[187]5:10 [188]5:10 [189]5:11 [190]5:11 [191]5:11 [192]5:12

[193]5:17 [194]5:17 [195]5:17 [196]5:17 [197]5:17 [198]5:18

[199]5:18 [200]5:18 [201]5:18 [202]5:19 [203]5:19 [204]5:19

[205]7:9 [206]7:10 [207]7:10 [208]7:22 [209]7:24 [210]8:1

[211]8:1 [212]8:1 [213]8:4 [214]8:7 [215]8:30 [216]8:30

[217]8:33 [218]8:33 [219]8:33 [220]8:33 [221]8:33

[222]8:33-35 [223]8:34 [224]8:34 [225]8:34 [226]8:35-38

[227]9 [228]10 [229]10:3 [230]10:5 [231]10:10 [232]10:10

[233]10:10

1 Corinthians

[234]1:30 [235]15:47

2 Corinthians

[236]4:16 [237]5:14 [238]5:15 [239]5:17 [240]5:21 [241]5:21

[242]5:21 [243]5:21 [244]5:21 [245]5:21 [246]10:9

Galatians

[247]1:8 [248]2:15 [249]2:16 [250]2:16 [251]3:10 [252]3:10

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Ephesians

[265]1:3 [266]1:4 [267]1:6 [268]1:6 [269]1:6 [270]1:7

[271]1:7 [272]1:13 [273]1:14 [274]1:14 [275]2:3 [276]2:3

[277]4:1 [278]4:18

Colossians

[279]1:21 [280]2:10 [281]2:14

1 Timothy

[282]3:16 [283]3:16

2 Timothy

[284]3:16

Titus

[285]3:5-7

Hebrews

[286]2:11 [287]4:16 [288]9:14 [289]10:7 [290]10:14 [291]11:31

James

[292]1:18 [293]2 [294]2:14 [295]2:14-26 [296]2:15 [297]2:16

[298]2:17 [299]2:18 [300]2:19 [301]2:20 [302]2:21 [303]2:22

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1 Peter

[310]1:4 [311]1:5 [312]3:18 [313]5:10

2 Peter

[314]1:1 [315]1:1 [316]1:1

1 John

[317]2:1 [318]2:2 [319]3:2 [320]3:17

Revelation

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310. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=1Pet&scrCh=1&scrV=4#ch10-p14.1

311. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=1Pet&scrCh=1&scrV=5#ch10-p14.2

312. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=1Pet&scrCh=3&scrV=18#ch5-p15.2

313. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=1Pet&scrCh=5&scrV=10#ch6-p12.1

314. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=2Pet&scrCh=1&scrV=1#ch1-p9.3

315. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?scrBook=2Pet&scrCh=1&scrV=1#ch4-p11.2

316. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?

scrBook=2Pet&scrCh=1&scrV=1#ch8-p7.1

317. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?
scrBook=1John&scrCh=2&scrV=1#ch2-p14.17

318. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?
scrBook=1John&scrCh=2&scrV=2#ch2-p14.18

319. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?
scrBook=1John&scrCh=3&scrV=2#ch10-p1.4

320. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?
scrBook=1John&scrCh=3&scrV=17#ch9-p13.4

321. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?
scrBook=Rev&scrCh=12&scrV=10#ch1-p15.1

322. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?
scrBook=Rev&scrCh=12&scrV=10#ch2-p14.9

323. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?
scrBook=Rev&scrCh=12&scrV=11#ch1-p15.2

324. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?
scrBook=Rev&scrCh=12&scrV=11#ch6-p6.1

325. file://localhost/ccel/p/pink/just/cache/just.html3?
scrBook=Rev&scrCh=21&scrV=27#ch4-p1.1