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JUSTIFICATION

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JUSTIFICATION MADE PLAIN

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”—Romans 3:24

Now, what is the meaning of justification? Divines will puzzle you, if you ask them. I must try the best I can to make justification plain and simple, even to the comprehension of a child. There is not such a thing as justification to be had on earth for mortal men, except in one way. Justification, you know, is a forensic[1] term: it is employed always in a legal sense. A prisoner is brought to the bar of justice to be tried. There is only one way whereby that prisoner can be justified, that is, he must be found not guilty. And if he is found not guilty, then he is justified, that is, he is proved to be a just man. If you find that man guilty, you cannot justify him. The Queen may *pardon* him, but she cannot *justify* him. The deed is not a justifiable one, if he were guilty concerning it, and he cannot be justified on account of it. He may be pardoned, but not royalty itself can ever wash that man’s character. He is as much a real criminal when he is pardoned as before. There is no means among men of justifying a man of an accusation which is laid against him, except by his being proved not guilty. Now, the wonder of wonders is, that we are proved guilty, and yet we are justified: the verdict has been brought in against us—guilty—and yet notwithstanding, we are justified. Can any earthly tribunal[2] do that? No, it remained for the ransom of Christ to effect that which is an impossibility to any tribunal upon earth. We are all guilty. Read the 23rd verse,

immediately preceding the text: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” There the verdict of guilty is brought in, and yet we are immediately afterwards said to be justified freely by his grace.

Now, allow me to explain the way whereby God justifies a sinner. I am about to suppose an impossible case. A prisoner has been tried and condemned to death. He is a guilty man; he cannot be justified because he is guilty. But now, suppose for a moment that such a thing as this could happen—that some second party could be introduced, who could take all that man’s guilt upon himself, who could change places with that man, and by some mysterious process, which of course is impossible with men, become that man or take that man’s character upon himself. He, the righteous man, putting the rebel in his place and making the rebel a righteous man—we cannot do that in our courts! If I were to go before a judge, and he should agree that I should be committed for a year’s imprisonment, instead of some wretch who was condemned yesterday to a year’s imprisonment, I could not take his guilt. I might take his punishment, but not his guilt. Now, what flesh and blood cannot do, that Jesus Christ by his redemption did. Here I stand, the sinner. I mention myself as the representative of you all I am condemned to die God says, “I will condemn that man, I must, I will—I will punish him.” Christ comes in, puts me aside, and stands himself in my stead. When the plea is demanded, Christ says, “Guilty;” takes my guilt to be his own guilt. When the punishment is to be executed, forth comes Christ. “Punish me,” he says; “I have put my righteousness on that man, and I have taken that man’s sins on me. Father, punish me, and consider that man to have been me. Let him reign in heaven; let me suffer misery. Let me endure his curse, and let him receive my blessing.” This marvelous doctrine of the changing of places of Christ with poor sinners is a doctrine of revelation, for it never could have been conceived by nature. Let me, lest I should have made a mistake, explain myself again. The way whereby God saves a sinner is not, as some say, by passing over the penalty. No; the penalty has been all paid. It is the putting of another person in the rebel’s place. The rebel must die. God says he must. Christ says, “I will be substitute for the rebel. The rebel shall take my place; I will take his.” God consents to it. No earthly monarch could have power to consent to such a change. But the God of heaven had a right to do as he pleased. In his infinite mercy he consented to the arrangement. “Son of my love,” said he, “you must stand in the sinner’s place; you must suffer what he ought to have suffered, you must be accounted guilty, just as he was accounted guilty, and then I will look upon the sinner in another light. I will look at him as if he were Christ; I will accept him as if he were my only-begotten Son, full of grace and truth. I will give him a crown in heaven, and I will take him to my heart for ever and ever.” This is the way we are saved. “Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.”

And now, let me further go on to explain some of the characteristics of this justification. As soon as a repenting sinner is justified, remember, he is justified for all his sins. Here stands a man all guilty. The moment he believes in Christ, his pardon at once he receives; and his sins are no longer his. They are cast into the depths of the sea. They were laid upon the shoulders of Christ, and they are gone. The man stands a guiltless man in the sight of God, accepted in the beloved. “What!” say you, “do you mean that literally?” Yes, I do. That is the doctrine of justification by faith. Man ceases to be regarded by divine justice as a guilty being; the moment he believes on Christ, his guilt is all taken away. But I am going a step further. The moment the man believes in Christ, he ceases to be guilty in God’s esteem; but what is more, he becomes righteous, he becomes meritorious, for in the moment when Christ takes his sins, he takes Christ’s righteousness; so that when God looks upon the sinner who but an hour ago was dead in sins, he looks upon him with as much love and affection as he ever looked upon his Son. He himself has said it: “As the Father loved me, so have I loved you.” He loves us as much as his Father loved him. Can you believe such a doctrine as that? Does it not pass all thought? Well, it is a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the doctrine whereby we must hope to be saved. Can I to any unenlightened person illustrate this thought better? I will give him the parable we have given to us in the prophets—the parable of Joshua the high-priest. Joshua comes in, clothed in filthy garments; those filthy garments representing his sins. Take away the filthy garments; that is *pardon*. Put a miter on his head; clothe him in royal raiment; make him rich and fair; that is *justification*. But where do these garments come from? And where do those rags go to? Why the rags that Joshua had on go to Christ, and the garments put on Joshua are the garments that Christ wore. The sinner and Christ do just what Jonathan and David did. Jonathan put his robes on David, David gave Jonathan his garments. So Christ takes our sins, we take Christ’s righteousness, and it is by a glorious substitution and interchange of places that sinners go free and are justified by his grace.

“But,” says one, “No one is justified like that till he dies.” Believe me, he is.

*“The moment a sinner believes
And trusts in his crucified God,
His pardon at once he receives;
Salvation in full, through his blood.”*

If that young man over there has really believed in Christ this morning, realizing by a spiritual experience what I have attempted to describe, he is as much justified in God's sight now as he will be when he stands before the throne. Not the glorified spirits above are more acceptable to God than the poor man below who is once justified by grace. It is a perfect washing, it is perfect pardon, perfect imputation. We are fully, freely, and wholly accepted through Christ our Lord.

Just one more word here, and then I will leave this matter of justification. Those who are once justified are justified *irreversibly*. As soon as a sinner takes Christ's place, and Christ takes the sinner's place, there is no fear of a second change. If Christ has once paid the debt, the debt is paid; and it will never be asked for again. If you are pardoned, you are pardoned once for ever. God does not give man a free pardon under his own sign-manual,[3] and then afterwards retract it and punish man: that be far from God so to do. He says, "I have punished Christ; you may go free." And after that, we may "rejoice in hope of the glory of God" that "being justified by faith we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." And now I hear one cry, "That is an extraordinary doctrine." Well, so some may think; but let me say to you, it is a doctrine professed by *all* Protestant churches, *though they may not preach it*. It is the doctrine of the Church of England, it is the doctrine of Luther, it is the doctrine of the Presbyterian Church: it is professedly the doctrine of all Christian churches. And if it seems strange in your ears, it is because your ears are estranged, and not because the doctrine is a strange one. It is the doctrine of holy writ that none can condemn whom God justifies and that none can accuse those for whom Christ hath died; for they are totally free from sin. So that, as one of the prophets has it, God sees no sin in Jacob or iniquity in Israel. In the moment they believe their sins being imputed to Christ, they cease to be theirs, and Christ's righteousness is imputed to them and accounted theirs, so that they are accepted.

Excerpted from *Justification by Grace*, a Sermon Delivered on Sabbath Morning, April 5, 1857, at the Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens

This sermon available in its entirety as a small booklet from Chapel Library.

1 **forensic** – relating to courts of law.

2 **tribunal** – the bench on which a judge sits to administer justice.

3 **sign-manual** – signature, especially of a monarch, at the top of a royal decree.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): Influential Baptist minister in England. The collected sermons of Spurgeon during his ministry fill 63 volumes. The sermons' 20–25 million words are equivalent to the 27 volumes of the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. The series stands as the largest set of books by a single author in the history of Christianity. Born at Kelvedon, Essex.

THE MEANING OF JUSTIFICATION

Charles Hodge (1797-1898)

How can a man be just with God? The answer given to this question decides the character of our religion, and, if practically adopted, our future destiny. To give a wrong answer is to mistake the way to Heaven. It is to err where error is fatal, because it cannot be corrected. If God requires one thing, and we present another, how can we be saved? If he has revealed a method in which he can be just and yet justify the sinner, and if we reject that method and insist upon pursuing a different way, how can we hope to be accepted? The answer, therefore, which is given to the above question, should be seriously pondered by all who assume the office of religious teachers and by all who rely upon their instructions. As we are not to be judged by proxy,[1] but every man must answer for himself, so every man should be satisfied for himself what the Bible teaches on this subject. All that religious teachers can do is to endeavor to aid the investigations of those who are anxious to learn the way of life. And in doing this, the safest method is to adhere strictly to the instructions of the Scriptures and to exhibit the subject as it is there presented.

It is one of the primary doctrines of the Bible, everywhere either asserted or assumed, that we are under the Law of God. This is true of all classes of men, whether they enjoy a divine revelation or not. Everything which God has revealed as a rule of duty enters into the constitution of the Law which binds those to whom that revelation is given and by which they are to be ultimately judged. Those who have not received any external revelation of the divine will are a law unto

themselves. The knowledge of right and wrong, written upon their hearts, is of the nature of a divine law, having its authority and sanction, and by it the heathen are to be judged in the last day.

God has seen fit to annex the promise of life to obedience to His Law. “The man which doeth those things shall live by them” (Rom 10:5) is the language of Scripture on this subject. To the lawyer who admitted that the Law required love to God and man, our Savior said, “Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live” (Luk 10:28). And to one who asked Him, “What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” He said, “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments” (Mat 19:17). On the other hand, the Law denounces death as the penalty of transgression: “The wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). Such is the uniform declaration of Scripture on this subject.

The obedience which the Law demands is called *righteousness*, and those who render that obedience are called *righteous*. To ascribe righteousness to anyone, or to pronounce him righteous, is the Scriptural meaning of the word “to justify.” The word never means “to make good” in a moral sense, but always “to pronounce just or righteous.” Thus God says, “I will not justify the wicked” (Exo 23:7). Judges are commanded to justify the righteous and to condemn the wicked (Deu 25:1). Woe is pronounced on those who “justify the wicked for reward” (Isa 5:23). In the New Testament it is said, “By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight” (Rom 3:20). “It is God that justifies. Who is he that condemns?” (Rom 8:33, 34). There is scarcely a word in the Bible the meaning of which is less open to doubt. There is no passage in the New Testament in which it is used out of its ordinary and obvious sense.

When God justifies a man, He *declares* him to be righteous. To justify never means “to render one holy.” It is said to be sinful to justify the wicked, but it could never be sinful to render the wicked holy. And as the Law demands righteousness, to impute or ascribe righteousness to anyone, is, in Scriptural language, to justify. To make (or constitute) righteous is another equivalent form of expression. Hence, to be righteous before God and to be justified mean the same thing as in the following passage: “For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified” (Rom 2:13).

The attentive and especially the anxious reader of the Bible cannot fail to observe that these various expressions—to be righteous in the sight of God, to impute righteousness, to constitute righteous, to justify, and others of similar import — are so interchanged as to explain each other and to make it clear that to justify a man is to ascribe or impute to him righteousness. The great question then is, How is this righteousness to be obtained? We have reason to be thankful that the answer which the Bible gives to this question is so perfectly plain.

In the first place, that the righteousness by which we are to be justified before God is not of works is not only asserted, but proved. The apostle’s first argument on this point is derived from the consideration that the Law demands a *perfect righteousness*. If the Law were satisfied by an imperfect obedience, or by a routine of external duties, or by any service which men are competent to render, then indeed justification would be by works. But since it demands perfect obedience, justification by works is, for sinners, *absolutely impossible*. It is thus the apostle reasons, “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, 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). As the Law pronounces its curse upon every man who continues not to do all that it commands, and as no man can pretend to this perfect obedience, it follows that all who look to the Law for justification must be condemned. To the same effect in a following verse he says, “And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.” That is, the Law is not satisfied by any single grace or imperfect obedience. It knows and can know no other ground of justification than complete compliance with its demands. Hence, in the same chapter Paul says, “For if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law” (Gal 3:21). Could the Law pronounce righteous, and thus give a title to the promised life to those who had broken its commands, there would have been no necessity of any other provision for the salvation of men; but as the Law cannot thus lower its demands, justification by the Law is *impossible*. The same truth is taught in a different form when it is said, “For if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Gal 2:21). There would have been no necessity for the death of Christ, if it had been possible to satisfy the Law by the imperfect obedience which we can render. Paul therefore warns all those who look to works for justification that they are debtors to do the whole law (Gal 5:3). It knows *no compromise*; it cannot demand less than what is right, and perfect obedience is right. Therefore its only language is as before, “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); and, “That the man which doeth those things shall live by them” (Rom 10:5). Every man, therefore, who expects

justification by works must see to it, not that he is better than other men, or that he is very exact and does many things, or that he fasts twice in the week and gives tithes of all he possesses, but that he is *sinless*.

That the Law of God is thus strict in its demands is a truth which lies at the foundation of all Paul's reasoning in reference to the method of justification. He proves that the Gentiles have sinned against the law written on their hearts, and that the Jews have broken the Law revealed in their Scriptures; both Jews and Gentiles, therefore, are under sin, and the whole world is guilty before God. Hence, he infers, by the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight. There is, however, no force in this reasoning, except on the assumption that the Law demands *perfect* obedience. How many men, who freely acknowledge that they are sinners, depend upon their works for acceptance with God! They see no inconsistency between the acknowledgment of sin and the expectation of justification by works. The reason is that they proceed upon a very different principle from that adopted by the apostle: they suppose that the Law may be satisfied by very *imperfect* obedience. Paul assumes that God demands perfect conformity to His will, that His wrath is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. With him, therefore, it is enough that men have sinned to prove that they cannot be justified by works. It is not a question of degrees, more or less, for as to this point there is no difference, since "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

This doctrine, though so plainly taught in Scripture, men are disposed to think very severe. They imagine that their good deeds will be compared with their evil deeds, and that they will be rewarded or punished as the one or the other preponderates;^[2] or that the sins of one part of life may be atoned for by the good works of another; or that they can escape by mere confession and repentance. They could not entertain such expectations if they believed themselves to be under a law. No human law is administered as men seem to hope the Law of God will be. He who steals or murders, though it be but once, though he confesses and repents, though he does any number of acts of charity, is not less a thief or murderer. The Law cannot take cognizance^[3] of his repentance and reformation. If he steals or murders, the Law condemns him. Justification by the Law is for him *impossible*. The Law of God extends to the most secret exercises of the heart. It condemns whatever is in its nature evil. If a man violate this perfect rule of right, there is an end of justification by the Law; he has failed to comply with its conditions, and the Law can only condemn him. To justify him would be to say that he had not transgressed.

Men, however, think that they are not to be dealt with on the principles of strict law. Here is their fatal mistake. It is here that they are in most direct conflict with the Scriptures, which proceed upon the uniform assumption of our subjection to the Law. Under the government of God, strict law is nothing but perfect excellence; it is the steady exercise of moral rectitude.^[4] Even conscience, when duly enlightened and roused, is as strict as the Law of God. It refuses to be appeased by repentance, reformation, or penance.^[5] It enforces every command and every denunciation of our Supreme Ruler, and teaches—as plainly as do the Scriptures themselves—that justification by an imperfect obedience is *impossible*. As conscience, however, is fallible, no reliance on this subject is placed on her testimony. The appeal is to the Word of God, which clearly teaches that it is impossible a sinner can be justified by works, because the Law demands perfect obedience.

The apostle's second argument to show that justification is not by works is the testimony of the Scriptures of the Old Testament. This testimony is urged in various forms. In the *first* place, as the apostle proceeds upon the principle that the Law demands perfect obedience, all those passages which assert the universal sinfulness of men are so many declarations that they cannot be justified by works. He therefore quotes such passages as the following: "There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. 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). The Old Testament, by teaching that all men are sinners, does, in the apostle's view, thereby teach that they can never be accepted before God on the ground of their own righteousness. To say that a man is a sinner is to say that the Law condemns him—and of course, it cannot justify him. As the ancient Scriptures are full of declarations of the sinfulness of men, so they are full of proof that justification is not by works.

But in the *second* place, Paul cites their direct affirmative testimony in support of his doctrine. In the Psalms it is said, "And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified" (Psa 143:2). This passage he often quotes, and to the same class belong all those passages which speak of the insufficiency or worthlessness of human righteousness in the sight of God.

In the *third* place, the apostle refers to those passages which imply the doctrine for which he contends; that is, to those which speak of the acceptance of men with God as a matter of grace, as something which they do not deserve, and for

which they can urge no claim founded upon their own merit. It is with this view that he refers to the language of David: “Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (Rom 4:7, 8). The fact that a man is forgiven implies that he is guilty, and the fact that he is guilty implies that his justification cannot rest upon his own character or conduct. It need hardly be remarked, that, in this view, the whole Scriptures, from the beginning to the end, are crowded with condemnations of the doctrine of justification by works. Every penitent confession, every appeal to God’s mercy is a renunciation of *all personal merit*, a declaration that the penitent’s hope was not founded on anything in himself. Such confessions and appeals are indeed often made by those who still rely upon their good works or inherent righteousness for acceptance with God. This, however, does not invalidate the apostle’s argument. It only shows that such persons have a different view of what is necessary for justification from that entertained by the apostle. They suppose that the demands of the Law are so low that although they are sinners and need to be forgiven, they can still do what the Law demands. Paul proceeds on the assumption that the Law requires perfect obedience, and therefore every confession of sin or appeal for mercy involves a renunciation of justification by the Law.

The Law knows nothing of anything but obedience as the ground of acceptance. If the Scriptures say we are accepted through faith, they thereby say that we are not accepted on the ground of obedience.

From *The Way of Life: A Handbook of Christian Belief and Practice* (1841)

- 1 **proxy** – substitute.
- 2 **preponderates** – outweighs.
- 3 **cognizance** – an acknowledgement.
- 4 **rectitude** – uprightness.
- 5 **penance** – acts of humiliation to show sorrow for sin.

Charles Hodge (1797-1898): the most influential American Presbyterian theologian of the nineteenth century. Taught theology at Princeton Seminary. Best known for his three volume *Systematic Theology*. Born in Philadelphia, PA.

JUSTIFICATION IS A FORENSIC ACT

Charles Hodge (1797-1898)

By this the Reformers intended, in the first place, to deny the Romish doctrine of subjective[1] justification. That is, that justification consists in an act of God making the sinner *subjectively* holy. Romanists confound or unite justification and sanctification. They define justification as “the remission of sin and infusion of new habits of grace.” By remission of sin they mean not simply pardon, but the removal of everything of the nature of sin from the soul. Justification, therefore, with them, is purely subjective, consisting in the destruction of sin and the infusion[2] of holiness.

In opposition to this doctrine, the Reformers maintained that by justification the Scriptures mean something different from sanctification. That the two gifts, although inseparable, are distinct, and that justification, instead of being an efficient act changing the inward character of the sinner, is a *declarative* act, announcing and determining his relation to the Law and justice of God.

In the second place, the Symbols[3] of the Reformation no less explicitly teach that justification is not simply pardon and restoration. It *includes* pardon, but it also includes a declaration that the believer is just or righteous in the sight of the Law. He has a right to plead a righteousness which completely satisfies its demands.

And, therefore, in the third place, affirmatively, those Symbols teach that justification is a judicial or *forensic* act, *i. e.*, an act of God as Judge proceeding according to Law, declaring that the sinner is just, *i. e.*, that the Law no longer condemns him, but acquits and pronounces him to be entitled to eternal life.

Here, as so often in other cases, the ambiguity of words is apt to create embarrassment. The Greek word *dikaio*s and the English word *righteous* have two distinct senses. They sometimes express moral character. When we say that God is righteous, we mean that He is right. He is free from any moral imperfection. So when we say that a man is righteous, we generally mean that he is upright and honest; that he is and does what he ought to be and do. In this sense the word expresses the relation which a man sustains to the rule of moral conduct. At other times, however, these words express, not moral character, but the relation which a man sustains to justice. In this sense a man is just with regard to whom justice is satisfied; or, against whom justice has no demands. Pilate said, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person" (Mat 27:24); *i. e.*, of this person who is free from guilt; free from anything which justifies his condemnation to death. "Christ also," says the Apostle, "hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust;" the innocent for the guilty (1Pe 3:18). See Rom 2:13; Rom 5:19. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."

If, therefore, we take the word *righteous* in the former of the two senses above mentioned, when it expresses *moral character*, it would be a contradiction to say that God pronounces the sinner righteous. This would be equivalent to saying that God pronounces the sinner to be not a sinner, the wicked to be good, the unholy to be holy. But if we take the word in the sense in which the Scriptures so often use it, as expressing relation to justice, then when God pronounces the sinner righteous or just, He simply declares that his guilt is expiated, [4] that justice is satisfied, that He has the righteousness which justice demands. This is precisely what Paul says, when he says that God "justifieth the ungodly" (Rom 4:5). God does not pronounce the ungodly to be godly; He declares that notwithstanding his personal sinfulness and unworthiness, he is *accepted* as righteous on the *ground of what Christ has done for him*.

Proof of the Doctrine just stated.

That *to justify* means neither simply to pardon, nor to *make inherently righteous* or good is proved,

FROM THE USAGE OF SCRIPTURE

1. By the uniform usage of the word *to justify* in Scripture. It is never used in either of those senses, but always to declare or pronounce just. It is unnecessary to cite passages in proof of a usage which is uniform. The few following examples are enough. "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" (Deu 25:1). "I will not *justify* the wicked" (Exo 23:7) "Which *justify* the wicked for reward" (Isa 5:23). "He that *justifieth* the wicked" is "abomination to the LO R D" (Pro 17:15). "He willing to *justify* himself" (Luk 10:29). "Ye are they which *justify* yourselves before men" (Luk 16:15). "Wisdom is *justified* of her children" (Mat 11:19). "A man is not *justified* by the works of the law" (Gal 2:16) "Whosoever of you are *justified* by the law; ye are fallen from grace" (v. 6). Thus men are said to *justify* God: "Because he *justified* himself, rather than God" (Job 32:2). "That thou mightest be *justified* when thou speakest" (Psa 51:4). "All the people that heard him, and the publicans, *justified* God" (Luk 7:29). The only passage in the New Testament where the word *righteous* (GK. *dikaio*s) is used in a different sense is Revelation 22:11, "He that is *righteous*, let him be *righteous* still." Even if the reading in this passage were undoubted, this single case would have no force against the established usage of the word.

The usage of common life as to this word is just as uniform as that of the Bible. The word always expresses a *judgment*, whether of the mind, as when one man justifies another for his conduct, or officially of a judge. If such be the established meaning of the word, it ought to settle all controversy as to the nature of justification. We are bound to take the words of Scripture in their true established sense. And, therefore, when the Bible says [that] God justifies the believer, we are not at liberty to say that it means that He pardons or that He sanctifies him. It means and can mean only that He *pronounces* him just.

Justification the Opposite of Condemnation.

2. This is still further evident from the antithesis⁵ between *condemnation* and *justification*. Condemnation is not the opposite either of pardon or of reformation. To condemn is to *pronounce guilty* or worthy of punishment. To justify is to *declare not guilty*, or that justice does not demand punishment, or that the person concerned cannot justly be condemned. When, therefore, the Apostle says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1), he declares that they are absolved from guilt; that the penalty of the Law cannot justly be inflicted upon them. "Who," he asks, "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" (8:33, 34). Against the elect in Christ no ground of condemnation can be presented. God pronounces them just, and therefore no one can pronounce them guilty.

This passage is certainly decisive against the doctrine of subjective justification in any form. This opposition between condemnation and justification is familiar both in Scripture and in common life. "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me" (Job 9:20). "And wilt thou condemn him that is most just" (Job 34:17). If to condemn does not mean to make wicked, to justify does not mean to make good. And if condemnation is a judicial [act], so is justification. In condemnation it is a judge who pronounces sentence on the guilty. In justification it is a judge who pronounces or who declares the person arraigned free from guilt and entitled to be treated as righteous.

Argument from Equivalent Forms of Expression.

3. The forms of expression which are used as equivalents of the word "justify" clearly determine the nature of the act. Thus Paul speaks of "the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works" (Rom 4:6). To impute righteousness is not *to pardon*; neither is it *to sanctify*. It means to justify, *i.e.*, to attribute righteousness. The negative form in which justification is described is equally significant. "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (Rom 4:7, 8). As "to impute sin" never means and cannot mean to *make* wicked; so the negative statement "not to impute sin" cannot mean to sanctify. And as "to impute sin" does mean to lay sin to one's account and to treat him accordingly; so to justify means to lay righteousness to one's account and treat him accordingly. "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world...He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already" (Joh 3:17, 18).

For "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). It was *judgment*, a judicial sentence, which came on men for the offence of Adam, and it is a judicial sentence (justification, GK. *dikaiosis*) which comes for the righteousness of Christ, or, as is said in v. 16 of the same chapter, it was a *judgment unto condemnation*, a condemnatory sentence that came for one offence; and a *free gift unto justification*, a sentence of gratuitous justification from many offences. Language cannot be plainer. If a sentence of condemnation is a *judicial* act, then justification is a *judicial* act.

Argument from the Statement of the Doctrine.

4. The judicial character of justification is involved in the mode in which the doctrine is presented in the Bible. The Scriptures speak of Law, of its demands, of its penalty, of sinners as arraigned at the bar of God, of the Day of Judgment. The question is "How shall man be just with God?" *The answer to this question determines the whole method of salvation.* The question is not, how a man can become holy? But, how can he become just? How can he satisfy the claims which justice has against him? It is obvious that if there is no such attribute as *justice* in God; if what we call justice is only benevolence, then there is no pertinency^[6] in this question: man is not required to be just in order to be saved. There are no claims of justice to be satisfied. Repentance is all that need be rendered as the condition of restoration to the favor of God. Or, any didactic^[7] declaration or exhibition of God's disapprobation^[8] of sin would open the way for the safe pardon of sinners. Or, if the demands of justice were easily satisfied; if partial, imperfect obedience and fatherly chastisements, or self-inflicted penances, would suffice to satisfy its claims, then the sinner need not be just with God in order to be saved.

But the human soul knows intuitively^[9] that these are refuges of lies. It knows that there *is* such an attribute as justice. It knows that the demands thereof are inexorable^[10] because they are righteous. It knows that it cannot be saved unless it be justified, and it knows that it cannot be declared just unless the demands of justice are fully satisfied. Low views of the evil of sin and of the justice of God lie at the foundation of all false views of this great doctrine.

The Apostle's argument in the Epistle to the Romans.

The Apostle begins the discussion of this subject by assuming that the justice of God, his purpose to punish all sin, to demand perfect conformity to his Law, is revealed from heaven, *i.e.*, so revealed that no man, whether Jew or Gentile, can deny it (Rom 1:18). Men, even the most degraded pagans, know the righteous judgment of God that those who sin are worthy of death (1:32). He next proves that all men are sinners and, being sinners, are under condemnation. The whole world is "guilty before God" (3:19). From this he infers, as intuitively certain (because plainly included in the premises), that no flesh living can be justified before God "by the deeds of the law," *i.e.*, on the ground of his own character and conduct. If guilty, he cannot be pronounced *not guilty* or *just*. In Paul's argument, to justify is to pronounce just. *Dikaios* is the opposite of *hupodikos*, that is, *righteous* is the opposite of *guilty*. To pronounce guilty is *to condemn*. To pronounce righteous, *i.e.*, not guilty, is *to justify*. If a man denies the authority of Scripture, it is conceivable that he may deny that justification is a judicial act. But it seems impossible that any one should deny that it is so represented in the Bible.

The Apostle, having taught that God is just, *i.e.*, that He demands the satisfaction of justice, and that men are sinners and can render no such satisfaction themselves, announces that such a righteousness has been provided and is revealed in the Gospel. It is not our own righteousness, which is of the Law, but the righteousness of Christ, and, therefore, the righteousness of God, in virtue of which, and on the ground of which, God can be just and yet justify the sinner who believes in Christ. As long as the Bible stands this must stand as a simple statement of what Paul teaches as to the method of salvation. Men may dispute as to what he *means*, but this is surely what he *says*.

ARGUMENT FROM THE GROUND OF JUSTIFICATION

5. The nature of justification is determined by its *ground*. This indeed is an anticipation of another part of the subject, but it is in point here. If the Bible teaches that the ground of justification, the reason why God remits[11] to us the penalty of the Law and accepts us as righteous in his sight, is something *out of ourselves*, something done *for* us and not what we do or experience, then it of necessity follows that justification is not subjective. It does not consist in the infusion of righteousness or in making the person justified personally holy. If the "formal cause" of our justification be *our* goodness, then we are justified *for what we are*. The Bible, however, teaches that no man living can be justified for what he is. He is *condemned* for what he is and for what he does. He is justified *for what Christ has done for him*.

ARGUMENT FROM THE IMMUTABILITY OF THE LAW

6. The doctrine that justification consists simply in pardon, and consequent restoration, assumes that the divine law is imperfect and mutable.[12] [But] the law of the Lord is perfect. And being perfect it cannot be disregarded. It demands nothing which ought not to be demanded. It threatens nothing which ought not to be inflicted. It is in fact its own executioner. Sin is death (Rom 8:6). The justice of God makes punishment as inseparable from sin, as life is from holiness. The penalty of the law is immutable, and as little capable of being set aside as the precept.[13] Accordingly the Scriptures everywhere teach that in the justification of the sinner there is no relaxation of the penalty. There is no setting aside or disregarding the demands of the law. We are delivered from the law, not by its abrogation,[14] but by its execution. (Gal

2:19). We are freed from the law by the body of Christ (Rom 7:4). Christ having taken our place bore our sins in His own body on the tree (1Pe 2:24). The handwriting which was against us, He took out of the way, nailing it to His cross (Col 2:14). We are therefore not under the law, but under grace (Rom 6:14). Such representations are inconsistent with the theory which supposes that the law may be dispensed with; that the restoration of sinners to the favor and fellowship of God requires no satisfaction to its demands; that the believer is pardoned and restored to fellowship with God, just as a thief or forger is pardoned and restored to his civil rights by the executive in human governments. This is against the Scriptures. God is just in justifying the sinner. He acts according to justice.

It will be seen that everything in this discussion turns on the question, Whether there is such an attribute in God as *justice*? If justice be only "benevolence guided by wisdom," then there is no justification. What evangelical Christians so regard is only pardon or sanctification. But if God, as the Scriptures and conscience teach, be a just God, as immutable in his justice as in his goodness and truth, then there can be no remission of the penalty of sin except on the ground of expiation, and no justification except on the ground of the satisfaction of justice. Therefore justification must be a *judicial* act, and

neither simply pardon nor the infusion of righteousness. These doctrines sustain each other. What the Bible teaches of the justice of God proves that justification is a judicial declaration that justice is satisfied. And what the Bible teaches of the nature of justification proves that justice in God is something more than benevolence.

From Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol. III, Soteriology*.

- 1 **subjective** – proceeding from or taking place within a person’s mind.
- 2 **infusion** – to fill or cause to be filled with something.
- 3 **Symbols** – confessions, creeds, summaries or the articles of religion.
- 4 **expiate** – make satisfaction for an offense.
- 5 **antithesis** – the direct or exact opposite.
- 6 **pertinency** – suitable relation or relevance to the matter at hand.
- 7 **didactic** – morally instructive.
- 8 **disapprobation** – moral disapproval; condemnation.
- 9 **intuitively** – perceived by the mind instinctively.
- 10 **inexorable** – not capable of being persuaded.
- 11 **remit** – to pardon; to forgive; to cancel guilt.
- 12 **mutable** – subject to change.
- 13 **precept** – any commandment or order intended as an authoritative rule.
- 14 **abrogation** – abolishing, doing away with.

THE IMMEDIATE AND ONLY GROUND OF JUSTIFICATION: THE IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST

James Buchanan (1804-1870)

Many have admitted that the Justification of sinners is connected with the Mediatorial work of Christ as its *meritorious* cause; while they have denied that it rests on His righteousness as its *immediate*[1] and *only* ground. They have not ventured to set aside His merits altogether or to say that His redeeming work had no influence in procuring our pardon and acceptance with God. On the contrary, they have professed to do signal homage[2] to the merits of Christ by acknowledging both their indispensable necessity and their certain efficacy;[3] but only as a means of procuring for us those terms of salvation and that measure of grace, which render it possible for us to be justified by *our personal obedience*, while they have utterly rejected the idea that His righteousness is or can be imputed to us. Others, again, have admitted a real and important, but *partial* and *imperfect*, imputation of His righteousness and have restricted it to the merits of His passive, as distinguished from that of His active, obedience—thereby leaving our Justification to rest, partly on His atoning sacrifice and partly on *our personal holiness* in heart and life. It is necessary, therefore, to show that His righteousness—considered as the entire merit of His whole Mediatorial work—is not only the meritorious cause, but also the *immediate ground* of our Justification; and for this end, to inquire what that righteousness is by which alone we can be justified; why it is said to be the righteousness of God or the merit of Christ; and how it becomes ours so as to be available for our Justification.

PROPOSITION: The righteousness, which is the ground of a sinner’s Justification, is denoted or described by various terms in Scripture, so that its nature may be determined by simply comparing these terms with one another; and then ascertaining[4] whether there be any righteousness to which they are all equally applicable and in which they all coincide in the fullness of their combined meaning.

That righteousness is called in Scripture “the righteousness of God”; “the righteousness of Christ”; the “righteousness of One”; “the obedience of One”; the “free gift unto justification of life”; “the righteousness which is of” or “by” or “through faith”; “the righteousness of God without the law”; and “the righteousness which God imputes without works.”

It will be found that, while these various expressions are descriptive of its different aspects and relations, they are all employed with reference to the *same* righteousness—that there is *one* righteousness in which they all find their common center, as so many distinct rays converging towards the same focus, while each retains its distinctive meaning—and that there is *no other righteousness* to which they can all be applied or in which they can find their adequate explanation.

It is called preeminently and emphatically “the righteousness of God.” By this name it is distinguished from the righteousness of man and even contrasted with it as a *ground* of Justification. It is brought in as a divine righteousness, only when all human righteousness has been shut out. The Apostle first proves that “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin”; and then introduces another righteousness altogether, “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifest...even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ” (Rom 3:20, 21). He contrasts the two great revelations—the revelation of *wrath*, which is by the Law, and the revelation of *righteousness*, which is by the Gospel: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men”; but “the Gospel of Christ...is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth...for therein is the righteousness of God revealed” (Rom 1:16, 18). And, in his own case, he renounces his own personal righteousness altogether as the ground of his acceptance and hope: “That I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Phi 3:8). The two righteousnesses are not only distinct, but *different*; and not only different, but *directly opposed* and *mutually exclusive* considered as grounds of Justification, insomuch that he who is justified by the one cannot *possibly* be justified by the other. If the righteousness of man be sufficient, the righteousness of God is superfluous.[5] If the righteousness of God be necessary, the righteousness of man can have no place. Nor can any conciliation[6] or compromise be effected between them, so as to admit of their being combined in one complex ground of acceptance. For they represent two methods of Justification which are *irreconcilably* opposed—the one by grace, the other by works: “For to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt; but to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom 4:4). “And if by grace, then is it no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace: but if it be of works, then is it no more grace, otherwise work is no more work” (Rom 6:6).

If we would understand the reason why it is called “the righteousness of God,” we must bear in mind that there was a twofold manifestation of righteousness in the Cross of Christ: there was *first* a manifestation of the righteousness of God the Father, in requiring a satisfaction to His justice and inflicting the punishment that was due to sin; and to this the Apostle refers when he says that “God set forth Christ to be a propitiation...to declare His righteousness, that He might be just, and the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.” There was, *secondly*, a work of righteousness by God the Son—His vicarious[7] righteousness as the Redeemer of His people, when He “became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross,” and thus became “the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” But these two—*God’s* righteousness, which was declared, and *Christ’s* righteousness, which was wrought out on the Cross—although they may be distinguished, cannot be separated from one another; for they were indissolubly[8] united in one and the same propitiation.[9] And while the righteousness which is revealed for our Justification may be called “the righteousness of God” with some reference to both, it properly consists in *the merit of Christ’s atoning sacrifice and perfect obedience*, for these were offered by Him as our Substitute and Representative.

The same righteousness which is called “the righteousness of God,” is also called “the righteousness of Christ.” We obtain “precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ”; or as it might be rendered, “through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (2Pe 1:1). “And this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jer 23:6). He is so called on account of the righteousness which He wrought out by His obedience unto death; for this righteousness is expressly connected with His Mediatorial work. “The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness’ sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honourable” (Isa 42:21). By His vicarious sufferings and obedience, He fulfilled the Law both in its precept and its penalty and is now said to be “the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth,” while His righteousness is identified with “the righteousness of God,” to which the unbelieving Jews refused to “submit themselves” and contrasted with “their own righteousness” which they “went about to establish,” “as it were by the works of the law” (Rom 10:3, 4).

PROPOSITION: This righteousness—being the merit of a work and not a mere quality of character—may become ours by being *imputed* to us, but cannot be communicated by being *infused*; and must ever continue to belong primarily and, in one important respect, exclusively to Him by whom alone that work was accomplished.

This statement consists of three distinct affirmations, which are directed against as many different errors, springing from a prevalent confusion of thought, in regard to the whole doctrine of Imputation. And it may be useful to consider each of them successively in connection with the proofs on which they severally depend.

It is affirmed, *first*, that the righteousness which is the ground of Justification, being the merit of a work undertaken and accomplished by Christ on behalf of His people, may become theirs by being imputed to them or reckoned to their account. This statement could scarcely be denied, if the merit of His work, done and finished “once for all,” were duly distinguished from an inherent and abiding quality of His personal character, and if that work were really regarded as having been undertaken and accomplished on the behalf of others, by One acting as their *Substitute* and *Surety*.^[10] For the merit of one can never, in any case, become available for the benefit of others, except when it is imputed to them. It cannot, from the very nature of the case, become theirs by infusion. The merit of one may be reckoned or put down to the account of another; but how can the *merit* of any work be infused, as a personal property, as holiness may unquestionably be? But when we affirm that the righteousness of Christ or the merit of His Mediatorial work may become ours by being imputed to us, we are met with a counterstatement to the effect—not that there was no merit in His work or that His work was not accomplished on behalf of others, which are the only important elements in the case—but that biblical criticism forbids the use of the term “impute,” except when it is applied to personal properties and acts. “There is not in all the Scriptures,” says one, “an instance in which one man’s sin or righteousness is said to be imputed to another.... There is not in all the Bible one assertion that Adam’s sin, or Christ’s righteousness, is imputed to us; nor one declaration that any man’s sin is ever imputed by God or man to another man.... Having followed (the Hebrew and Greek verbs) through the concordances, I hesitate not to challenge a single example which is fairly of this nature in all the Bible.” [Moses Stuart, *Commentary on Romans*]

These are bold statements and may seem to imply a denial of the doctrine, as well as a criticism on the term by which it has been usually expressed; but we refer at present only to the latter. Every reader of his English Bible *without the aid of critical scholarship* may discover—and it has never been denied, so far as we know, by any competent divine—that the verbs in question are applicable to cases, in which that which is imputed to any one was personally his own beforehand—that one man, for instance, who is righteous, is reckoned and treated as righteous; and that another man who is wicked, is reckoned and treated as wicked. But the question is, Whether the same verbs may not be equally applicable to other cases, in which that which is imputed to him was not personally his own, and did not previously belong to him, but became his only by its being put down to his account? The debt due and the wrong done by Onesimus to Philemon were not chargeable against Paul personally or previously, but he became chargeable with them simply by their being imputed to him: “If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account” or “*impute that to me*”; “I will repay it.” (Phm 18, 19).

In like manner, He was made “to be sin for us, who knew no sin,” and “bare our sins in his own body on the tree”—not that our sins were chargeable against Him personally or previously, but they became His by imputation on God’s part and voluntary susception^[11] on His own (2Co 5:21; 1Pe 2:24). If it be said that the mere word *impute* is not employed in this case, it may be asked whether there be any other which could more accurately express the fact, if it be a fact; and whether the word itself is not used in a parallel case, when God is said “to impute righteousness without works,” as often as “He justifieth the ungodly”? (Rom 4:5, 6) Indeed, Justification consists partly in the “non-imputation” of sin, which did belong personally to the sinner, and partly in the “imputation” of righteousness, of which he was utterly destitute before. And the meaning of the one may be ascertained from the meaning of the other, while *both* are necessary to express the full meaning of Justification. We conclude, therefore, that the righteousness of Christ—being the merit of a work done and finished—may be imputed for the Justification of His people, but cannot possibly be infused.

It is affirmed, *secondly*, that the righteousness of Christ, to be available for the benefit of His people, must become theirs by imputation and not by infusion. Most of the leading errors on the subject of Justification may be traced to obscure or defective views in regard to the nature or import of imputation, and have arisen from supposing either that it consists in the *infusion of moral qualities*, in which case Justification is confounded with Sanctification; or that, in so far as imputation may be distinguished from such infusion, it is founded, at least, on the moral qualities which thus become inherent, in which case Justification has for its immediate ground a *personal* and not a *vicarious* righteousness. The only effectual way of striking at the root of these prevailing and pernicious^[12] errors is by forming distinct and definite conceptions of what is really meant by the general doctrine of Imputation, whether in regard to sin or to righteousness. And the likeliest means of doing so seems to be to take the three cases of Imputation which have been affirmed by divines to have the express sanction of Scripture—namely 1) that of the guilt of Adam’s first sin to his posterity, 2) that of the

guilt of our sins to Christ as our Substitute, and 3) that of His righteousness to us as the immediate ground of our Justification—to compare them with one another, to eliminate whatever is peculiar to each of them, and to frame our general idea of imputation by including in it only what is common to them all. For as each of the three is a specific example of the same generic class, we may hope, by means of this process of comparison and abstraction,[13] to arrive at a correct result and to retain whatever is essential to the nature of imputation, while we exclude only what is peculiar to each of its special exemplifications.[14] It may thus be made manifest that imputation, whether it be of sin or of righteousness, neither consists in the infusion of moral qualities, nor is in all cases necessarily connected with it.

Take the three cases of Imputation which have been specified and compare them with one another. We find that in two out of the three a change of moral character is the invariable concomitant[15] or consequent of imputation; for the imputation of *Adam's guilt* to his posterity was connected with their loss of original righteousness and the corruption of their whole nature. And the imputation of *Christ's righteousness* to His people is connected, in like manner, with their renewal and sanctification. But we also find that, in the third case—which is as real and as complete an instance of imputation as either of the other two—the imputation of *our sins* to Christ was not connected with any change in His holy character, or with the infusion of any, even the slightest, taint of moral evil. Whence we infer that imputation, so far from consisting in, is not even invariably *connected* with the infusion of moral qualities. We find again, that in two out of the three cases, representative and personal agency are so clearly distinguished as to make it manifest, that the party to whom anything is imputed is not supposed to have had any active participation in the doing of it: for our sins were really, and in the full sense of the term, imputed to Christ as our Substitute, yet He had no share in the commission of them. And His righteousness is, in like manner, imputed to us for our Justification, yet we had no share with Him in “finishing the work which the Father had given Him to do.” Whence we infer that, in the third case—the imputation of Adam's guilt to his posterity—it is so far from being necessary to suppose our personal participation in his act, that such a supposition would go far to destroy the doctrine of Imputation altogether, by setting aside the fundamental distinction between the agency of the representative and that of those who were represented by him. We find again that in all the three cases, imputation, whether of sin or of righteousness, is founded on a federal[16] relation subsisting between one and many—for Adam was constituted the head and representative of his race, and Christ the Substitute and Surety of His people. This relation may be fitly described as amounting to a union between them, in virtue of which they are regarded and treated as being, in some respects, one. But this union is not such as to destroy the distinction between their respective personalities or to confound their several acts: for it is still true, that the representative was personally different from those whom he represented, and that his obedience or disobedience was his own act and not theirs, although it is imputed to them.

These few specimens may suffice to illustrate the general doctrine of Imputation, and the best way of acquiring a distinct conception of its true meaning. They show that, while the righteousness of Christ, considered as the merit of His Mediatorial work, may become ours by being imputed to us, it is not communicated as an inherent habit or quality might be; and that our Justification, in so far as it depends on that righteousness neither consists in the infusion of moral qualities nor rests on these qualities, when they have been infused, as its proper ground.

It is affirmed, *thirdly*, that the righteousness of Christ, considered as the merit of His Mediatorial work, must ever continue, even when it is imputed to us, to belong primarily, and, in one important respect, exclusively, to Him by whom alone that work was accomplished. It is His righteousness in a sense in which it can never be ours: it is His, as having been wrought out by Him; and it is ours, only as it is imputed to us. It is His, as it was the merit of His personal obedience; and it is ours, only as it is derived to us from Him. He claims a special propriety[17] in it even when He makes it over to His people. The whole merit is His; the gracious imputation of it only is ours.

- 1 **immediate** – without the intervention of another cause; direct.
- 2 **signal homage** – noteworthy or special honor expressed publicly.
- 3 **efficacy** – power to produce a desired effect; effectiveness.
- 4 **ascertaining** – discovering with certainty.
- 5 **superfluous** – being beyond what is required.
- 6 **conciliation** – reconciliation.
- 7 **vicarious** – acting in the place of someone else.
- 8 **indissolubly** – permanent.
- 9 **propitiation** – appeasing one offended and rendering him favorable.
- 10 **surety** – one who enters into a bond to undertake the responsibilities or debt of another.
- 11 **susception** – the act of taking.
- 12 **pernicious** – causing great harm; destructive.

- 13 **abstraction** – summarizing.
14 **exemplifications** – illustrating by example.
15 **concomitant** – conjoined with; accompanying.
16 **federal** – pertaining to a covenant or treaty.
17 **propriety** – exclusive right of possession; ownership.

James Buchanan: (1804-1870) prolific and popular writer with the reputation as an earnest, eloquent, and powerful evangelical preacher in the Free Church of Scotland. Best known for *The Office and Work of the Holy Spirit* and *The Doctrine of Justification*. Born in Paisley, Scotland.

THE INSTRUMENT OF JUSTIFICATION

A.W. Pink (1886-1952)

“Being justified freely by his grace...being now justified by His blood...being now justified by faith”—Romans 3:24; 5:9; 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.

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[1] that we are “justified by *grace*” and “justified by His *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 honor 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[2] 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 savior 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:[3] “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-dishonoring error contained in those statements will be exposed later on in this chapter.

“How doth faith justify a sinner in the sight of God? A. Faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of those other graces which do always accompany it, or of good works that are the fruits of it, not as if the grace of faith, or any act thereof, were imputed to him for his justification; but *only as it is an instrument* by which he receiveth and applieth Christ and his righteousness.” (*Westminster Larger Catechism Q. 73*). 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[4] 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 (Luk 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 Savior Jesus Christ’ (2Pe 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” (Abraham 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 just, because we believe that God is propitious[5] to us through Christ” (John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*).

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*[6] 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. “Those whom God effectually calleth He also freely justifieth; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous: not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone: nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience, to them as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness, by faith: which faith they have not of themselves; it is the gift of God” (*Westminster Confession of Faith 11.1*).

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” (John 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,[7] 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 makes God guilty of a downright lie, for it represents Him as giving to faith a *fictional* 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 fullness; impotency lying down upon Christ’s strength” (John 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” (John Owen, *Works*, Vol. 10, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*). “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” (Thomas Goodwin, *Works*, Vol. 8, *The Objects and Acts of Justifying Faith*).

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 faith *justifies* us. The efficacy is in Christ's blood; the reception of it is in our faith" (Stephen 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.[8] And, strictly speaking, the sinner is justified by Christ's sacrifice alone, not by his act of believing in it" (W. G. T. 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.

"For how does true faith justify unless by uniting us to Christ, so that being made one with him, we may be admitted to a participation in his righteousness?" (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, xvii, 11). 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 a probation[9] 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.

Excerpted from the large booklet *The Doctrine of Justification* available from Chapel Library.

1 **postulates** – fundamental elements.

2 **arrogate** – to claim for one's self without right.

3 **Plymouth Brethren** – community of Christians whose first congregation was established in Plymouth, Devon, Eng., in 1831.

Biblical prophecy and the Second Coming of Christ were emphasized among them. John Nelson Darby, a former clergyman in the Church of Ireland (Anglican), soon became a dominant personality in the movement.

4 **proffered** – to offer for acceptance.

5 **propitious** – ready to forgive sins and bestow blessings.

6 **in lieu of** – instead of; in place of.

7 **puerilities** – childishnesses; immaturities.

8 **masticating** – chewing.

9 **approbation** – warm approval; liking; praise.

A. W. Pink: (1886-1952) Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, voluminous author of *Studies in the Scriptures*, and many books including his well-known *The Sovereignty of God*. Born in Great Britain, immigrated to the U.S., and later returned to his homeland in 1934.

NOT FAITH, BUT CHRIST

Horatius Bonar (1808-1889)

Our justification is the direct result of our believing the gospel. Our knowledge of our own justification comes from believing God's promise of justification to every one who believes these glad tidings. For there is not only the divine testimony, but there is the promise annexed to it, assuring eternal life to every one who receives that testimony. There is first, then, a believed *gospel*, and then there is a believed *promise*. The latter is the "appropriation," as it is called; which, after all, is nothing but the acceptance of the *promise* which is every where coupled with the gospel message. The believed gospel *saves*; but it is the believed promise that *assures* us of this salvation.

Yet, after all, faith is not our righteousness. It is accounted to us *in order to* righteousness (Rom 4:5), but not *as* righteousness. For in that case it would be *a work* like any other doing of man and as such would be incompatible with the righteousness of the Son of God—the "righteousness which is by faith." Faith connects us with the righteousness and is therefore totally distinct from it. To confound the one with the other is to subvert the whole gospel of the grace of God. Our act of faith must ever be a separate thing from that which we believe.

God reckons the believing man as having done *all righteousness*, though he has not done *any*, and though his faith is not righteousness. In this sense, it is that faith is *counted* to us for, or in order to, righteousness and that we are "justified by faith." Faith does not justify as a work, or as a moral act, or a piece of goodness, nor as a gift of the Spirit, but simply because it is the bond between us and the Substitute—a very slender bond in one sense, but strong as iron in another. The work of Christ *for* us is the object of faith. The Spirit's work *in us* is that which produces this faith: it is out of the former, not of the latter, that our peace and justification come. Without the touch of the rod the water would not have gushed forth; yet it was the *rock* and not the *rod* that contained the water.

The bringer of the sacrifice into the tabernacle was to lay his hand upon the head of the sheep or the bullock; otherwise the offering would not have been accepted for him. But the laying on of his hand was not the same as the victim on which it was laid. The serpent-bitten Israelite was to look at the uplifted serpent of brass in order to be healed. But his looking was not the brazen serpent. We may say it was his looking that healed him, just as the Lord said, "Thy faith hath saved thee." But this is figurative language. It was not his act of looking that healed him, but the *object* to which he looked. So faith is not our righteousness: it merely knits us to the righteous One and makes us partakers of His righteousness. By a natural figure of speech, faith is often magnified into something great; whereas it is really nothing but our consenting to be saved by another. Its supposed magnitude is derived from the greatness of the object which it grasps, the excellence of the righteousness which it accepts. Its preciousness is not its own, but the preciousness of *Him* to whom it links us.

Faith is not our physician. It only brings us *to* the Physician. It is not even our medicine; it only administers the medicine, divinely prepared by Him who "healeth all our diseases." In all our believing, let us remember God's word to Israel: "I am Jehovah, that healeth thee" (Exo 14:26). Our faith is but our touching Jesus; and what is even this, in reality, but *His touching us*?

Faith is not our savior. It was not faith that was born at Bethlehem and died on Golgotha for us. It was not faith that loved us and gave itself for us; that bore our sins in its own body on the tree; that died and rose again for our sins. Faith is

one thing, the Savior is another. Faith is one thing, and the cross is another. Let us not confound them, nor ascribe to a poor, imperfect act of man, that which belongs exclusively to the Son of the Living God.

Faith is not perfection. Yet only by perfection can we be saved, either our own or another's. That which is imperfect cannot justify, and an imperfect faith could not in any sense be a righteousness. If it is to justify, it must be *perfect*. It must be like "the Lamb without blemish and without spot." An imperfect faith may connect us with the perfection of another; but it cannot of itself do aught[2] for us, either in protecting us from wrath or securing the divine acquittal. All faith here is imperfect; and our security is this, that it matters not how poor or weak our faith may be: if it touches the perfect One, all is well. The touch draws out the virtue that is in *Him*, and we are saved. The slightest imperfection in our faith, if faith were our righteousness, would be fatal to every hope. But the imperfection of our faith, however great, if faith be but the approximation or contact between us and the fullness of the Substitute, is no hindrance to our participation of His righteousness. God has asked and provided a *perfect* righteousness: He nowhere asks nor expects a perfect faith. An earthenware pitcher can convey water to a traveler's thirsty lips as well as one of gold; nay, a broken vessel, even if there be but "a sherd[3] to take water from the pit" (Isa 30:14), will suffice. So a feeble, very feeble faith, will connect us with the righteousness of the Son of God; the faith, perhaps, that can only cry, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mar 9:24).

Faith is not satisfaction to God. In no sense and in no aspect can faith be said to satisfy God or to satisfy the law. Yet if it is to be our righteousness, it must satisfy. Being *imperfect*, it cannot satisfy; being human, it cannot satisfy, even though it were perfect. That which satisfies must be capable of bearing our guilt; and that which bears our guilt must be not only perfect, but divine. It is a sin-bearer that we need, and our faith cannot be a sin-bearer. Faith can expiate no guilt, can accomplish no propitiation, can pay no penalty, can wash away no stain, can provide no righteousness. It brings us to the cross, where there is expiation and propitiation and payment and cleansing and righteousness. But in itself it has no merit and no virtue.

Faith is not Christ nor the cross of Christ. Faith is not the blood, nor the sacrifice. It is not the altar, nor the laver[4], nor the mercy-seat, nor the incense. It does not work, but accepts a work done ages ago. It does not wash, but leads us to the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. It does not create; it merely links us to that new thing which was created when the "everlasting righteousness" was brought in (Dan 9:24).

And as faith goes on, so it continues; always the beggar's out-stretched hand, never the rich man's gold; always the cable, never the anchor; the knocker, not the door or the palace or the table; the handmaid, not the mistress; the lattice which lets in the light, not the sun.

Without worthiness in itself, it knits us to the infinite worthiness of Him in whom the Father delights; and so knitting us, presents us perfect in the perfection of another. Though it is not the foundation laid in Zion, it brings us to that foundation and keeps us there "grounded and settled" (Col 1:23), that we may not be moved away from the hope of the gospel. Though it is not "the gospel," the "glad tidings," it receives this good news as God's eternal verities[5] and bids the soul rejoice in them. Though it is not the burnt-offering, it stands still and gazes on the ascending flame, which assures us that the wrath which should have consumed the sinner has fallen upon the Substitute.

Though faith is not "the righteousness," it is the tie between it and us. It realizes our present standing before God in the excellency of His own Son. And it tells us that our eternal standing in the ages to come is in the same excellency and depends on the perpetuity of that righteousness which can never change. For never shall we *put off* that Christ whom we *put on* when we believed (Rom 12:14; Gal 3:27). This divine raiment is "to everlasting." It waxes not old, it cannot be rent, and its beauty fadeth not away.

Nor does faith lead us away from that cross to which at first it led us. Some in our day speak as if we soon got beyond the cross and might leave it behind; that the cross having done all it could do for us when first we came under its shadow, we may quit it and go forward; that to remain always at the cross is to be babes, not men.

But what is the cross? It is not the mere wooden pole or some imitation of it, such as Romanists use. These we may safely leave behind us. We need not pitch our tent upon the literal Golgotha or in Joseph's garden. But the great truth which the cross embodies we can no more part with than we can part with life eternal. In this sense, to turn our back upon the cross is to turn our back upon Christ crucified—to give up our connection with the Lamb that was slain. The truth is, that all

that Christ did and suffered, from the manger to the tomb, forms one glorious whole, no part of which shall ever become needless or obsolete; no part of which can ever leave without forsaking the whole. I am always at the manger, and yet I know that mere incarnation cannot save; always at Gethsemane, and yet I believe that its agony was not the finished work; always at the cross, with my face toward it and my eye on the crucified One, and yet I am persuaded that the sacrifice there was completed once for all; always looking into the grave, though I rejoice that it is empty and that “He is not here, but is risen”; always resting (with the angel) on the stone that was rolled away, and handling the grave-clothes, and realizing a risen Christ, nay, an ascended and interceding Lord; yet on no pretext whatever leaving any part of my Lord’s life or death behind me, but unceasingly keeping up my connection with Him, as born, living, dying, buried, and rising again, and drawing out from each part some new blessing every day and hour.

Man, in his natural spirit of self-justifying legalism, has tried to get away from the cross of Christ and its perfection, or to erect another cross instead, or to set up a screen of ornaments between himself and it, or to alter its true meaning into something more congenial to his tastes, or to transfer the virtue of it to some act or performance or feeling of its own. Thus the simplicity of the cross is nullified,[7] and its saving power is denied. For the cross saves completely or not at all. Our faith does not divide the work of salvation between itself and the cross. It is the acknowledgment that the cross alone saves, and that it saves alone. Faith adds *nothing* to the cross or to its healing virtue. It owns the fullness and sufficiency and suitableness of the work done there and bids the toiling spirit cease from its labors and enter into rest. Faith does not come to Calvary to *do* anything. It comes to see the glorious spectacle of all things done and to accept this completion without a misgiving as to its efficacy. It listens to the “It is finished!” of the Sin-bearer and says, “Amen.” Where faith begins, there labor ends—labor, I mean, “for” life and pardon.

Faith is rest, not toil. It is the giving up all the former weary efforts to do or feel something good in order to induce[8] God to love and pardon; and the calm reception of the truth so long rejected, that God is not waiting for any such inducements, but loves and pardons of His own goodwill and is showing that good-will to any sinner who will come to Him on such a footing, casting away his own performances or goodnesses, and relying implicitly upon the free love of Him who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

Faith is the acknowledgment of the entire absence of all goodness in us and the recognition of the cross as the substitute for all the want on our part. Faith saves because it owns the complete salvation of another, and not because it contributes *anything* to that salvation. There is no dividing or sharing the work between our own belief and Him in whom we believe. The whole work is His, not ours, from the first to the last. Faith does not believe in itself, but in the Son of God. Like the beggar, it receives everything, but gives nothing. It consents to be a debtor for ever to the free love of God. Its resting-place is the foundation laid in Zion. It rejoices in another, not in itself. Its song is “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us” (Tit 3:5).

Christ crucified is to be the burden of our preaching and the substance of our belief from first to last. At no time in the saint’s life does *he cease to need the cross*; though at times he may feel that his special need, in spiritual perplexity or the exigency[9] of conflict with evil, may be the Incarnation, or the agony in the Garden, or the resurrection, or the hope of the promised advent, to be glorified in His saints and admired in all them that believe.

But the question is not, “What truths are we to believe?” but, “What truths are we to believe *for justification*?”

That Christ is to come again in glory and in majesty as Judge and King is an article of the Christian faith, the disbelief of which would almost lead us to doubt the Christianity of him who disbelieves it. Yet we are not in any sense justified by the *second* advent of our Lord, but solely by His *first*. We believe in His ascension, yet our justification is not connected with it. So we believe His resurrection, yet we are not justified by faith in it, but by faith in His death—that death which made Him at once our propitiation and our righteousness.

“Who...was raised again for our justification” (Rom 4:25) is the clear statement of the word. The resurrection was the visible pledge of a justification already accomplished.

“The power of His resurrection” (Phi 3:10) does not refer to atonement or pardon or reconciliation, but to our being renewed in the spirit of our minds, to our being “begotten again unto a living hope, by the resurrection from the dead” (1Pe 1:3). That which is *internal*, such as our quickening, our strengthening, our renewing, may be connected with

resurrection and resurrection power; but that which is *external*, such as God's pardoning and justifying and accepting must be connected with the cross alone.

It is *the blood* that justifies (Rom 5:9). It is the blood that pacifies the conscience, purging it from dead works to serve the living God (Heb 9:14). It is *the blood* that emboldens us to enter through the veil into the holiest and go up to the sprinkled mercy-seat. It is *the blood* that we are to drink for the quenching of our thirst (Joh 6:55). It is *the blood* by which we have peace with God (Col 1:20). It is *the blood* through which we have redemption (Eph 1:7) and by which we are brought nigh (Eph 2:13), by which we are sanctified (Heb 13:12). It is the *blood* which is the seal of the everlasting covenant (Heb 13:20). It is the *blood* which cleanses (1Jo 1:7), which gives us victory (Rev 12:11) and with which we have communion in the Supper of the Lord (1Co 10:16). It is the *blood* which is the purchase-money or ransom of the church of God (Act 20:28).

The blood and the resurrection are very different things; for the blood is *death* and the resurrection is *life*.

“Christ in us, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27), is a well-known and blessed truth. But Christ *in* us, [*as*] *our justification*, is a ruinous error leading man away from a crucified Christ—a Christ crucified *for* us. Christ *for* us is one truth; Christ *in* us is quite another. The mingling of these two together or the transposition of them is the nullifying of the one finished work of the Substitute. Let it be granted that Christ in us is the source of holiness and fruitfulness (Joh 15:4); but let it never be overlooked that first of all there be Christ *for* us, as our propitiation, our justification, our righteousness. It is not *incarnation* on the one hand, nor is it *resurrection* on the other, on which we are thus to feed and out of which this life comes forth: it is that which lies between these two—death—the sacrificial death of the Son of God.

It is not the personality or the life-history of the Christ of God which is the special quickener^[10] and nourishment of our souls, but the *blood-shedding*. Not that we are to separate the former from the latter; but still it is on the latter that we are specially to feed and this all the days of our lives.

This article, a chapter from the book *The Everlasting Righteousness* published by Chapel Library is also available as a tract.

1 **annexed** – attached.

2 **aught** – anything.

3 **sherd** – a fragment of pottery.

4 **I a v e r** – a large basin used in the ancient Jewish Temple by a priest for washings before making a sacrificial offering.

5 **verities** – statements, principles, or beliefs that are true, especially enduring truth.

6 **congenial** – agreeable.

7 **nullify** – to counteract the force or effectiveness of.

8 **induce** – motivate; influence; persuade.

9 **exigency** – urgent requirements; pressing needs.

10 **quickener** – one who revives or communicates life.

Horatius Bonar: (1808-1889) Scottish Presbyterian minister whose poems, hymns, and religious tracts were widely popular during the 19th century. His three series of *Hymns of Faith and Hope* (1857–66) introduced hymns that are still sung throughout the English-speaking world, such as “I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say,” “I Was a Wondering Sheep,” and “I Lay My Sins on Jesus.” Born in Edinburgh, Scotland.

RECONCILING PAUL AND JAMES

William Pemble (1591-1623)

We are to give you warning of that stumbling stone which St. James (as it may seem) has laid in our way, lest any should dash his faith upon it and fall, as our adversaries have done, into that error of justification by works. That blessed apostle, in the second chapter of his epistle, seems not only to give occasion to, but directly to teach this doctrine of justification by works. For in verse 21 and following, he expressly says that Abraham was justified by works when he offered his son

Isaac upon the altar, and also that Rahab was in like manner justified by works when she entertained the spies. Whence also he sets down a general conclusion that man is justified by works and not by faith alone (Jam 2:24).

Now at first glance, nothing can be spoken more contrary to St. Paul's doctrine in Romans and elsewhere. For speaking of the same example of Abraham, he says (exactly to the contrary) that Abraham was not justified by works, for then he might have boasted (Rom 4:2). And treating generally of man's justification by faith, after a strong dispute he draws forth the conclusion that a man is justified by faith without the works of the law (Rom 3:28). This conclusion appears contradictory to that of St. James. This harsh discord between these apostles appears to some as impossible to resolve by any qualification; knowing that the Holy Ghost never forgets Himself, some have concluded that if the Spirit of truth spoke by St. Paul, it was doubtless the spirit of error that spoke by the author of this epistle of James.

But this medicine is worse than the disease and is rather violence than skill thus to cut the knot where it cannot be readily untied. A safer and milder course may be held, and some means found out for the resolving of this grand difference, without robbing the Church of so much precious treasure of divine knowledge as is stored up in this epistle. Wherefore both they of the Romish and we of the Reformed Churches, admitting this epistle as canonical,[1] do each search after a fit reconciliation between the apostles. But they and we are irreconcilable in our various reconciliations of them.

There are two ways whereby [the Reformed] reconcile this seeming difference.

The first way is by distinguishing the word *justification*, which may be taken either for the absolution[2] of a sinner in God's judgment or for the declaration of a man's righteousness before men. This distinction is certain and has its ground in Scripture, which uses the word *justify* in both ways, for the acquitting of us in God's sight and for the manifestation of our innocence before man against accusation or suspicion of fault. They apply this distinction to reconcile the two apostles thus: Paul speaks of justification in the forum of *God*; James speaks of justification in the forum of *man*. A man is justified by faith without works, says Paul; that is, in *God's* sight a man obtains remission of sins and is reputed to be just only for his faith in Christ, not for his works' sake. A man is justified by works and not by faith only, says James; that is, in *man's* sight we are declared to be just by our good works and not by our faith only, which with other inward and invisible graces is made visible unto man only in the good works which they see us perform. That this application is not unfit to reconcile this difference may be shown by the following analysis.

First, as for Paul, it is agreed on all sides that he speaks of man's justification in God's sight (Rom 3:20).

Second, as for James, we are to show that with just probability he may be understood as referring to the declaration of our justification and righteousness before men. For proof thereof, the text affords us these reasons.

“Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works” (Jam 2:18). Here the true Christian, speaking to the hypocritical boaster of his faith, requires of him a declaration of his faith and justification thereby by a real proof, not a verbal profession, promising for his part to manifest and prove the truth of his own faith by his good works. Whence it appears that, before man, none can justify the soundness of his faith but by his works thence proceeding.

Abraham is said to be justified “when he offered up his son Isaac upon the altar” (Jam 2:21). Now it is manifest that Abraham was justified in God's sight long before, even 25 years earlier (Gen 15:6). Therefore, by that admirable work of his in offering his son he was declared before all the world to be a just man and a true believer. And for this purpose God tempted³ Abraham in that trial of his faith, that thereby all believers might behold a rare pattern of a lively and justifying faith and see that Abraham was not without good cause called “the father of the faithful.”

It is said that Abraham's faith “wrought with his works, and by works was his faith made perfect” (Jam 2:22). Even in the judgment of popish expositors, such as Lorinus,[4] this is to be understood of the manifestation of Abraham's faith by his works. His faith directed his works; his works manifested the power and perfection of his faith.

It is not, then, without good probability of reason that Calvin and other expositors on our side have given this solution to the problem. This now is the first way of reconciling these two passages. Nevertheless, although this approach may be defended against anything that our adversaries object to the contrary, yet many very learned divines choose rather to tread in another path and more nearly to press the apostles' steps, whom also in this point I willingly follow.

The second way, then, of reconciling these passages is by distinguishing the word “faith,” which is taken in a double sense. It is first taken for that faith which is true and living (faith which works through love) and is fruitful in all manner of obedience. Second, it is taken for that faith which is false and dead, being only a bare acknowledgment of the truth of all articles of religion accompanied with an outward formality of profession, but yet destitute of sincere obedience.

This distinction of this word “faith” is certain by the Scriptures, as has heretofore been shown in our discussions of that grace. Our men now apply it thus: When Paul affirms that we are justified by faith only, he speaks of that faith which is true and living, working by charity. When James denies that a man is justified by faith only, he disputes against that faith which is false and dead, without power to bring forth any good works. So that the apostles speak no contradiction because Paul teaches that we are justified by a *true* faith and James affirms that we are not justified by a *false* faith.

Again, Paul says we are not justified by works; James says we are justified by works. Neither is there any contradiction at all here. For James understands by “works” a working faith, in opposition to the idle and dead faith before spoken of, by a metonymy[5] of the effect. Whence it is plain that these two propositions, that we are not justified by works (which is Paul’s) and that we are justified by a working faith (which is James’s), sweetly consort together. Paul severs works from our justification, but not from our faith. James joins works to our faith, but not to our justification.

Let me make this a little plainer by a similitude or two. There is a great difference between these two sayings: A man lives by a reasonable soul, and a man lives by reason. The former is true and shows us what qualities and power are essential unto that soul whereby a man lives. But the latter is false, because we do not live by the quality or power of reason, though we live by that soul which has that quality necessarily belonging to it, without which it is no human soul. So also in these propositions: The shoot lives through its authoring life breath; the shoot lives through its growth. Any puny mind can tell that the former is true and the other false. For, although in the vegetative soul whereby plants live, there are necessarily required for its existence those three faculties of nourishment, growth, and procreation, yet it is not the faculty of growing that gives life unto plants, for they live when they are not growing.

In like manner, these two propositions—that we are justified by a working faith and that we are justified by works—differ greatly. The first is true and shows us what qualities are necessarily required unto the existence of that faith, whereby the just shall live, namely that beside the power of believing in the promise there is also a habitual proneness[6] and resolution unto the doing of all good works joined with it. But the later proposition is false. For although true faith is equally as apt to work in bringing forth universal obedience to God’s will as it is apt to believe and trust perfectly in God’s promises, yet nevertheless we are not justified by it as it brings forth good works, but as it embraces the promises of the gospel.

Now, then, James affirms that which is true, that we are justified by a working faith; and Paul denies that which is false, that we are justified by works.

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1 **canonical** – of or appearing in the biblical canon, i.e., the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament or the twenty-seven books of the New Testament.

2 **absolution** –sentence of a judge declaring an accused person innocent.

3 **tempted** – tested.

4 **Lorinus, John** – 1569-1634, Jesuit commentator.

5 **metonymy** – figure of speech in which one word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated, as in the use of *Washington* for the U. S. government.

6 **proneness** – tendency; inclination.

William Pemble: (1591-1623) Puritan, educated Magdalen College, Oxford, where he graduated in 1614, having been tutored by the Puritan Richard Capel. He worked at his studies and preaching so hard that it damaged his health, and he died of a fever in 1623. Born in Egerton, Kent.

ABUSE OF JUSTIFICATION

Robert Traill (1642-1716)

Objection 1: Is there not a great decay amongst professors in real practical godliness? Are we like the old Protestants or the old Puritans? I answer, That the decay and degeneracy is great and heavily to be bewailed. But what is the cause and what will be its cure? Is it because the doctrine of morality, virtue, and good works is not enough preached? This cannot be: for there hath been for many years a public ministry in the nation that make these their constant themes. Yet the land is become as Sodom for all lewdness; and the tree of profaneness is so grown that the sword of the magistrate hath not yet been able to lop off any of its branches. Is it because men have too much faith in Christ? Or too little? Or none at all? Would not faith in Christ increase holiness? Did it not always so? And will it not still do it? Was not the holiness of the first Protestants eminent and shining? The certain spring of this prevailing wickedness in the land, is people's *ignorance* and *unbelief* of the gospel of Christ; and that grows by many prophets that speak lies to them in the name of the Lord.

Objection 2: But do not some abuse the grace of the gospel and turn it into wantonness? *Answer:* Yes; some do, ever did, and still will do so. But it is only the *ill-understood* and *not believed* doctrine of grace that they abuse. The grace itself no man can abuse, for its power *prevents* its abuse. Let us see how Paul, that blessed herald of this grace, dealeth with this objection (Rom 6:1, &c). What doth he to prevent this abuse? Is it by extenuating what he had said (Rom 5:20) that *grace abounds much more, where sin had abounded*? Is it by mincing grace smaller, that men may not choke upon it or surfeit by it? Is it by mixing something of the law with it to make it more wholesome? No: but only by plain asserting the power and influence of this grace, wherever it really is. This grace is all treasured up in Christ Jesus, offered to all men in the gospel, poured forth by our Lord in the working of faith, and drunk in by the elect in the exercise of faith. [It] becomes in them a living spring, which *will* and *must* break out and spring up in all holy conversation. He exhorts them to drink in more and more of this grace by faith. And as for such as pretend to grace and live ungodly, the Spirit of God declares they are *void of grace*, which is always fruitful in good works (2Pe 2 & Jude's epistle). The apostle orders the churches to cast such out (1Co 5; 2Ti 3:5); and to declare to them, as Peter did to a professor that *they have no part nor portion in this matter, for their heart is not right in the sight of God*; though the doctrine be right, that they hypocritically profess (Act 8:20, 21).

From Vindication of the Protestant Doctrine Concerning Justification

Robert Traill: (1642-1716) Presbyterian. Educated at Edinburgh. Ended his days as a faithful minister in London. Born in Elie, Fifeshire, Scotland.

PEACE THROUGH JUSTIFICATION

J.C.Ryle (1816-1900)

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" —Romans 5:1

Let me show you the rock from which justification and peace with God flow. That rock is Christ. The true Christian is not justified because of any goodness of his own. His peace is not to be traced up to any work that he has done. It is not purchased by his prayers and regularity, his repentance and his amendment, his morality and his charity. All these are utterly unable to justify him. In themselves they are defective in many things and need a large forgiveness. And as to justifying him, such a thing is not to be named. Tried by the perfect standard of God's law the best of Christians is nothing better than a justified sinner, a pardoned criminal. As to merit, worthiness, desert, or claim upon God's mercy, he has

none. Peace built on any such foundations as these is utterly worthless. The man who rests upon them is miserably deceived.

Never were truer words put on paper than those which Richard Hooker[1] penned on this subject 280 years ago. Let those who would like to know what English clergymen thought in olden times, mark well what he says: “If God would make us an offer thus large, Search all the generation of men since the fall of your father Adam, and find *one man*, that hath done any *one action*, which hath past from him pure, without any stain or blemish at all;—and for that one man’s one only action, neither man nor angel shall find the torments which are prepared for both:—do you think this ransom, to deliver man and angels, would be found among the sons of men?”

The best things we do have somewhat in them to be pardoned. How then can we do *anything* meritorious and worthy to be rewarded? —these words I desire entirely to subscribe. I believe that no man can be justified by his works before God in the slightest possible degree. Before man he may be justified: his works may evidence the reality of his Christianity. Before God he cannot be justified by anything that he can do: he will be always defective, always imperfect, always short-coming, always far below the mark, so long as he lives. It is not by works of his own that any one ever has peace and is a justified man.

But how then is a true Christian justified? What is the secret of that peace and sense of pardon which he enjoys? How can we understand a Holy God dealing with a sinful man as with one innocent, and reckoning him righteous notwithstanding his many sins?

The answer to all these questions is short and simple. The true Christian is counted righteous for the sake of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is justified because of the death and atonement of Christ. He has peace because “Christ died for his sins according to the Scriptures.” This is the key that unlocks the mighty mystery. Here the great problem is solved, how God can be just and yet justify the ungodly. The life and death of the Lord Jesus explain all. “He is our peace.” (1Co 15:3; Eph 2: 14).

Christ has stood in the place of the true Christian. He has become his Surety and his Substitute. He undertook to bear all that was to be borne, and to do all that was to be done, and what He undertook He performed. Hence the true Christian is a justified man (Isa 53:6).

Christ has suffered for sins, the “just for the unjust.” He has endured our punishment in His own body on the cross. He has allowed the wrath of God, which we deserved to fall on His own head. Hence the true Christian is a justified man (1 Pet. 3:18).

Christ has paid the debt the Christian owed by His own blood. He has reckoned for it and discharged it to the uttermost farthing by His own death. God is a just God, and will not require his debts to be paid twice over. Hence the true Christian is a justified man (Acts 20:28; 1Pe 1:18, 19).

Christ has obeyed the law of God perfectly. The devil, the Prince of this World, could find no fault in Him. By so fulfilling it He brought in an everlasting righteousness, in which all His people are clothed in the sight of God. Hence the true Christian is a justified man (Dan 9:24; Rom 10:4).

Christ, in one word, has lived for the true Christian. Christ has died for him. Christ has gone to the grave for him. Christ has risen again for him. Christ has ascended up on high for him, and gone into heaven to intercede for his soul. Christ has done all, paid all, suffered all that was needful for his redemption. Hence arises the true Christian’s justification,—hence his peace. In himself there is nothing, but in Christ he has all things that his soul can require (Col 2:3; 3:11).

Who can tell the blessedness of the exchange that takes place between the true Christian and the Lord Jesus Christ! Christ’s righteousness is placed upon him, and his sins are placed upon Christ. Christ has been reckoned a sinner for his sake, and now he is reckoned innocent for Christ’s sake. Christ has been condemned for his sake though there was no fault in Him,—and now he is acquitted for Christ’s sake, though he is covered with sins, faults, and short-comings. Here is wisdom indeed! God can now be just and yet pardon the ungodly. Man can feel that he is a sinner, and yet have a good

hope of heaven and feel peace within. Who among men could have imagined such a thing? Who ought not to admire it when he hears it? (2Co 5:21).

We read of Jesus, the Son of God, coming down to a world of sinners, who neither cared for Him before He came, nor honored Him when He appeared. We read of Him going down to the prison-house, and submitting to be bound, that we the poor prisoners might be able to go free. We read of Him becoming obedient to death—the death of the cross—that we the unworthy children of Adam might have a door opened to life ever-lasting. We read of Him being content to bear our sins and carry our transgressions, that we might wear His righteousness, and walk in the light and liberty of the Sons of God (Phi 2:8).

This may well be called a “love that passeth knowledge!” In no way could free grace ever have shone so brightly as in the way of *justification by Christ* (Eph 3:19).

This is *the old way* by which alone the children of Adam, who have been justified from the beginning of the world, have found their peace. From Abel downwards, no man or woman has ever had one drop of mercy excepting through Christ. To Him every altar that was raised before the time of Moses was intended to point. To Him every sacrifice and ordinance of the Jewish law was meant to direct the children of Israel. Of Him all the prophets testified. In a word, if you lose sight of justification by Christ, a large part of the Old Testament Scripture will become an unmeaning tangled maze.

This, above all, is the way of justification which exactly *meets the wants and requirements of human nature*. There is a conscience left in man, although he is a fallen being. There is a dim sense of his own need, which in his better moments will make itself heard, and which nothing but Christ can satisfy. So long as his conscience is not hungry, any religious toy will satisfy a man’s soul and keep him quiet. But once let his conscience become hungry, and nothing will quiet him but real spiritual food and no food but Christ.

There is something within a man when his conscience is really awake, which whispers, “*There must be a price paid for my soul or no peace.*” At once the Gospel meets him with Christ. Christ has already paid a ransom for his redemption. Christ has given Himself for him Christ has redeemed him from the curse of the law, being made a curse for him (Gal 2:20; 3:13).

There is something within a man, when his conscience is really awake, which whispers, “*I must have some righteousness or title to heaven or no peace.*” At once the Gospel meets him with Christ. He has brought in an everlasting righteousness. He is the end of the law for righteousness. His name is called the Lord our righteousness. God has made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2Co 5:21; Rom 10:4; Jer 23:6).

There is something within a man, when his conscience is really awake, which whispers, “*There must be punishment and suffering because of my sins or no peace.*” At once the Gospel meets him with Christ. Christ hath suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, to bring him to God. He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. By His stripes we are healed (1Pe 2:24; 3:18).

There is something within a man, when his conscience is really awake, which whispers, “*I must have a priest for my soul or no peace.*” At once the Gospel meets him with Christ. Christ is sealed and appointed by God the Father to be the Mediator between Himself and man. He is the ordained Advocate for sinners. He is the accredited Counselor and Physician of sick souls. He is the great High Priest, the Almighty Absolver, the Gracious Confessor of heavy-laden sinners (1Ti 2:5; Heb 8:1).

I know there are thousands of professing Christians who see no peculiar beauty in this doctrine of justification by Christ. Their hearts are buried in the things of the world. Their consciences are palsied,[2] benumbed, and speechless. But whenever a man’s conscience begins really to feel and speak, he will see something in Christ’s atonement and priestly office which he never saw before. Light does not suit the eye nor music the ear, more perfectly than Christ suits the real wants of a sinful soul. Hundreds can testify that the experience of a converted heathen in the island of Raiatea[3] in the South Pacific Ocean has been exactly their own. “I saw,” he said, “an immense mountain, with precipitous[4] sides, up which I endeavored to climb, but when I had attained a considerable height, I lost my hold and fell to the bottom. Exhausted with perplexity and fatigue, I went to a distance and sat down to weep, and while weeping, I saw a drop of

blood fall upon that mountain, and in a moment it was dissolved.” He was asked to explain what all this meant. “That mountain,” he said, “was my sins, and that drop which fell upon it, was one drop of the precious blood of Jesus, by which the mountain of my guilt was melted away.” [*William’s South Sea Missions*]

This is the one true way of peace,—justification by Christ. Beware lest any turn you out of this way and lead you into any of the false doctrines of the Church of Rome. Alas, it is wonderful to see how that unhappy Church has built a house of error hard by the house of truth! Hold fast the truth of God about justification, and be not deceived. Listen not to any thing you may hear about other mediators and helpers to peace. Remember there is no *mediator* but one,—Jesus Christ; no *purgatory*[5] for sinners but one,—the blood of Christ; no *sacrifice* for sin but one,—the sacrifice once made on the cross; no *works* that can merit anything but the work of Christ; no *priest* that can truly absolve—but Christ. Stand fast here, and be on your guard. Give not the glory due to Christ to another.

What do you know of Christ? I doubt not you have heard of Him by the hearing of the ear, and repeated His name in the Belief. You are acquainted perhaps with the story of His life and death. But what experimental knowledge have you of Him? What practical use do you make of Him? What dealings and transactions have there been between your soul and Him?

Oh, believe me, there is *no peace with God excepting through Christ!* Peace is His peculiar gift. Peace is that legacy which He alone had power to leave behind Him when He left the world. All other peace beside this is a mockery and a delusion. When hunger can be relieved without food, and thirst quenched without drink, and weariness removed without rest, then, and not till then will men find peace without Christ.

Now, is this peace your own? Bought by Christ with His own blood, offered by Christ freely to all who are willing to receive it,—is this peace your own? Oh, rest not: rest not till you can give a satisfactory answer to my question—HAVE YOU PEACE?

Let me show you the fountain from which true peace is drawn. That fountain is justification.

The peace of the true Christian is not a vague, dreamy feeling, without reason and without foundation. He can show cause for it. He builds upon solid ground. He has peace with God *because he is justified.*

Without justification it is impossible to have real peace. Conscience forbids it. Sin is a mountain between a man and God and must be taken away. The sense of guilt lies heavy on the heart and must be removed. Unpardoned sin will murder peace. The true Christian knows all this well. His peace arises from a consciousness of his sins being forgiven and his guilt being put away. His house is not built on sandy ground. His well is not a broken cistern, which can hold no water. He has peace with God *because he is justified.*

He is justified, and his sins are *forgiven.* However many, and however great, they are cleansed away, pardoned, and wiped out. They are blotted out of the book of God’s remembrance. They are sunk into the depths of the sea. They are cast behind God’s back. They are searched for and not found. They are remembered no more. Though they may have been like scarlet, they are become white as snow; though they may have been red like crimson, they are as wool. And so he has peace.

He is justified and *counted righteous* in God’s sight. The Father sees no spot in him and reckons him innocent. He is clothed in a robe of perfect righteousness and may sit down by the side of angels without feeling ashamed. The holy law of God, which touches the thoughts and intents of men’s hearts, cannot condemn him. The devil, “the accuser of the brethren,” can lay nothing to his charge to prevent his full acquittal. And so he has peace.

Is he not naturally a poor, weak, erring, defective *sinner?* He is. None knows that better than he does himself. But notwithstanding this, he is reckoned complete, perfect, and faultless before God, for he is justified.

Is he not naturally a *debtor?* He is. None feels that more deeply than he does himself. He owes ten thousand talents, and has nothing of his own to pay. But his debts are all paid, settled, and crossed out for ever, for he is justified.

Is he not naturally liable to the curse of *a broken law*? He is. None would confess that more readily than he would himself. But the demands of the law have been fully satisfied, the claims of justice have been met to the last tittle,[6] and he is justified.

Does he not naturally *deserve punishment*? He does. None would acknowledge that more fully than he would himself. But the punishment has been borne. The wrath of God against sin has been made manifest. Yet he has escaped and is justified.

Does any one who is reading this paper know anything of all this? Are you justified? Do you [believe that you are] pardoned, forgiven, and accepted before God? Can you draw near to Him with boldness and say, “Thou art my Father and my Friend, and I am Thy reconciled child”? Oh, believe me; you will never taste true peace until you are *justified!*

Where are your sins? Are they removed and taken away from off your soul? Have they been reckoned for and accounted for in God’s presence? Oh, be very sure these questions are of the most solemn importance! A peace of conscience not built on justification is a perilous dream. From such a peace the Lord deliver you!

Go with me in imagination to some of our great London hospitals. Stand with me there by the bedside of some poor creature in the last stage of an incurable disease. He lies quiet perhaps and makes no struggle. He does not complain of pain perhaps and does not appear to feel it. He sleeps and is still. His eyes are closed. His head reclines on his pillow. He smiles faintly and mutters something. He is dreaming of home and his mother and his youth. His thoughts are far away—but is this health? Oh, no! *No!* It is only the effect of opiates.[7] Nothing can be done for him. He is dying daily. The only object is to lessen his pain. His quiet is an unnatural quiet. His sleep is an unhealthy sleep. You see in that man’s case a vivid likeness of *peace without justification*. It is a hollow, deceptive, unhealthy thing. Its end is death.

Go with me in imagination to some lunatic asylum. Let us visit some case of incurable delusion. We shall probably find some one who fancies that he is rich and noble, or a king. See how he will take the straw from off the ground, twist it round his head, and call it a crown. Mark how he will pick up stones and gravel and call them diamonds and pearls. Hear how he will laugh, and sing, and appear to be happy in his delusions—but is this happiness? Oh, no! We know it is only the result of ignorant insanity. You see in that man’s case another likeness of *peace built on fancy and not on justification*. It is a senseless, baseless thing. It has neither root nor life.

Settle it in your mind that there can be no peace with God, unless we feel that we are justified. *We must know what is become of our sins*. We must have a reasonable hope that they are forgiven and put away. We must have the witness of our conscience that we are reckoned not guilty before God. Without this it is vain to talk of peace. We have nothing but the shadow and imitation of it. “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked” (Isa 57:21).

Did you ever hear the sound of the trumpets which are blown before the judges, as they come into a city to open the Assizes?[8] Did you ever reflect how different are the feelings which these trumpets awaken in the minds of different men? The innocent man, who has no cause to be tried, hears them unmoved. They proclaim no terrors to him. He listens and looks on quietly and is not afraid. But often there is some poor wretch, waiting his trial in a silent cell, to whom those trumpets are a knell[9] of despair. They warn him that the day of trial is at hand. Yet a little time and he will stand at the bar of justice and hear witness after witness telling the story of his misdeeds. Yet a little time and all will be over—the trial, the verdict, and the sentence—and there will remain nothing for him but punishment and disgrace. No wonder the prisoner’s heart beats, when he hears that trumpet’s sound!

There is a day fast coming when all who are *not justified* shall despair in like manner. The voice of the archangel and the trump of God shall scatter to the winds the false peace which now buoys up many a soul. The Day of Judgment shall convince thousands of self-willed people too late, that it needs something more than a few beautiful ideas about “God’s love and mercy” to reconcile a man to his Maker and to deliver his guilty soul from Hell. No hope shall stand in that awful day but the hope of the justified man. No peace shall prove solid, substantial, and unbroken, but the peace which is built on *justification*.

Is this peace your own? Rest not, rest not, if you love life, till you know and [believe] that you are a justified man. Think not that this is a mere matter of names and words. Flatter not yourself with the idea that justification is “an abstruse[10] and difficult subject,” and that you may get to Heaven well enough without knowing anything about it. Make up your

mind to the great truth that there can be no heaven without peace with God, and no peace with God without justification. And then give your soul no rest till you are a JUSTIFIED MAN.

- 1 **Richard Hooker** – 1554?-1600 theologian who created a distinctive Anglican theology, and a master of English prose and legal philosophy.
- 2 **palsied** – trembling or shaking.
- 3 **Raiatea** – largest island of the Leeward Group, Society Islands, French Polynesia, in the central South Pacific.
- 4 **precipitous** – extremely steep.
- 5 **Purgatory** – the Roman Catholic doctrine of an intermediate state after death in which the souls of persons are purified as they suffer for past sins. The author is telling us that the only place we are “purified” is in the blood of Christ.
- 6 **tittle** – the tiniest bit.
- 7 **opiates** – any of various sedative narcotics containing opium.
- 8 **assizes** – one of the periodic court sessions formerly held in each of the counties of England and Wales for the trial of civil or criminal cases.
- 9 **knell** – a signal of disaster or destruction.
- 10 **abstruse** – difficult to understand.

J. C. Ryle: (1816-1900) Bishop of the Anglican Church. Revered author of *Holiness*, *Knots Untied*, *Old Paths*, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, and others. Born at Macclesfield, Cheshire County, England.

