



**Sermons  
'What is Sin?'  
and  
'Justification  
by Faith'**



**John Kennedy**

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## What is Sin?

*“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight” Psalm 51:4.*

There are two lights exhibited on shore for the guidance of those “that go down to the sea in ships” — the *beacon* light, to warn them away from the dangerous reef or headland, and the *harbour* light, to direct them to a place of safety. I have seen a shipwreck take place owing to one of these lights being mistaken for the other. The account of David’s sin, in the inspired history of his life, and the record of his repentance in this psalm, are like these two lights — the former warning us away from unwatchfulness, the latter guiding us back to God with confession of our sin. To take encouragement in sin from the former, instead of being warned away “from all appearance of evil,” is to run the awful risk — or rather to encounter the certain danger — of soulwreck; and not to follow David, in his return, “with weeping and supplication,” to God on His mercy-seat, is to keep our souls away from the only true rest and blessedness, and still to expose them to the storm of His wrath.

In David’s penitence, of which this psalm is a record, there are the following elements: 1. A view of his sin as it is “against” and in the “sight” of “God,” such as causes him to justify God, in condemning him to death, according to the curse of the law, which he had broken, and as quite shut him up to the rich sovereign mercy of God, as the only fountain whence pardon could come to him, and to an atoning sacrifice such as would satisfy the justice of God, as the only meet channel for the outflow of His grace. 2. A confession of original sin — of his total depravity — as the result of his fellowship in “the guilt of Adam’s first sin,” which alone accounted for his being “shapen in iniquity” and conceived “in sin.” 3. An earnest desire for an intimation of pardon from God. 4. Panting of heart for renewing grace. 5. Longings for the joy of God’s salvation. 6. A sense of his need of being kept from sinning in the future, as one who could not trust in himself, and who sought to be upheld by the “free Spirit” of the Lord. And 7. In the measure in which hope was restored to his heart, he desired employment in the Lord’s service, as

well as preparation for it, the conversion of sinners unto God, and “the good of Jerusalem.”

It is the first of these we at present are called to consider — David’s view of sin as “*against*” and in the “*sight*” of God.

### I. “*Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned.*”

He had acted to the injury of his own soul, he had offended, by his conduct, those who feared the Lord, and by his evil example he had encouraged the ungodly to continue in sin; but yet he says, “Against Thee, *Thee only*, have I sinned.” Viewing his conduct *as sin*, he thinks only of its being against God. It might bring misery on himself, it might bring grief to the hearts of the godly, and it might encourage others to continue to act the part of suicides, but his conduct he regarded as *sinful* only as it was “*against*” God.

1. *It was against the law of God.* Associating the law with God, how venerable it seemed to his eyes, opened as these were, to behold the glory of Jehovah, as Lawgiver and Judge; how awful seemed to him the guilt which was involved in the breach of such a law; and how impossible escape from the law’s penalty appeared to him as he thought of the omnipotence, faithfulness, and justice of Him who was Judge of all, unless mercy came to him with a free pardon through atoning blood. One may transgress the law of his country, and his offence never be discovered; or even if it be discovered, he may not be convicted of the crime; or by some miscarriage of justice the execution may not follow the passing of the sentence. But in none of these ways can, under His government, any transgressors of the law of God escape. Sinner, seek to realise this. Have done with dreaming of being able to sin with impunity while the eye that is “as a flame of fire” is on you, while the sword of divine justice is wielded by the Almighty, and while it is impossible for God to lie. Either life, through the righteousness of Christ being placed to your account, or death, as the wages of your sin, is the only alternative to you, and to me, and to all. “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law; for sin is the transgression of the law,” and “the soul that sinneth shall die.”

2. *Sin is against the will of God.* Not merely against what was the will of God, but against what, at the moment when the sin is committed, is the will of God — against a present volition of the will of God bearing authoritatively on the transgressor, and in

opposition to what he is about to do, or is doing. There is many a law on the Statute Book of our nation the very existence of which is unknown to our Sovereign, and which cannot be regarded as an intended expression of her will; and we must not think of a transgressor of our laws as acting in opposition to a present exercise of the Queen's will bearing on him individually. But do not approach so to conceive of the relation in which God stands to His own law, and to those by whom that law is broken. His will is ever active in volitions which accord with the claims of His commandments, and bears according to the law's demands on each individual, always and everywhere. Because of this there must be in every act of sin a collision with the will of God, the Most High, "whose name is holy." Think of the weak worm dashing himself against the will of Jehovah, as, swayed by enmity, he ventures to transgress His law, which is "holy, and just, and good." Friend, do not conceive of God as like yourself, and one to be trifled with, as if He could forget your sin; and do not imagine that such collisions with the will of God can take place with impunity though "sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily." The will of God, now expressed in the form of law, shall soon and surely be expressed in a providence by which you shall be utterly and eternally overwhelmed.

3. *Sin is rebellion against the authority of God.* The authority of God as our Lawgiver — His right to reign — rests on what He is in the infinite excellence of His being and glory. He, because of what He is, is entitled to be Lord over all — to bring His will in the form of law to bear on each rational being whom He hath created, whether their place originally was heaven or earth. There is rebellion against authority thus founded and asserted, in every transgression of His law, and this cannot be without a denial of His right to reign, without an attack on His throne. How fearful sin is as implying — necessarily implying — this! And there cannot be rebellion such as this that does not imply a claim on the part of the transgressor to the place which necessarily and eternally belongs to the Most High. The rebelling will of the creature makes this demand. He raises himself thronewards, in his meanness and loathsomeness, and requires that Jehovah should give place to him. "Who is the Lord that He should reign over us?" is the mad shout that reaches the ear of God from the hearts of all transgressors of His law; and, as they demand for

themselves the sovereignty which is God's, they ask, "Who is Lord over us?"

4. *Sin is against the name of God.* There can be no sinning that does not cast dishonour on the moral glory of Jehovah. He demands perfect love to Himself, because of what He is in the infinite loveliness of His moral character. His claim for love rests on what He is in the infinite beauty of His holiness. On this the eye of His omniscience ever rests, and to this He "is," and must be "love." And through this love to Himself He is "blessed for ever" in the enjoyment of Himself. And He cannot have this knowledge of, this love to, and this enjoyment of, Himself, and act righteously as the supreme Governor, without demanding love to Himself from all rational beings. One who did not necessarily make such a demand could not reasonably be worshipped. And there is goodness as well as authority in such a claim. If to Himself His love to Himself is the source of such blessedness, what can be more surely good than to demand love to Him from His creatures, who shall never fail to find that through love to Him satisfying blessedness shall flow into their hearts from "the fountain of living waters." But whichever of the Ten Commandments you break, you cannot do so without refusing this love to God. You cannot break any of the commandments of the second table of the law without refusing such love to God as would be expressed in submission to His authority. For He requires with equal authority love to your neighbour as love to Himself. To refuse this expression of love to Him is blasphemously to declare Him unworthy of what He demands, though His right to be loved rests on what He is in the infinite glory of His moral character. But there can be no negative feeling towards the holiness of God. If there is not love to it as the spring of action in the heart, there must be enmity. In every unconverted man there is nothing but the flesh, and the minding of the flesh is enmity against God. Think of God beholding, loving, and rejoicing in, His own infinite beauty, and at the same time having before His eye the creature of His hand turning away from and hating Him because His name is holy, and expressing in his transgression of His law his enmity to what He so infinitely loves and enjoys. How marvellous is the patience of God with thee, who wast observed by Him thus dishonouring His glorious name in every one of all thy countless transgressions!

5. *Sin is against the being of God.* God cannot be without being

infinitely great and infinitely holy. His greatness is the basis of His right to issue a law, and His holiness is the basis of His claim for love. His law demanding obedience in love rests on His unchangeable majesty and loveliness. It is entrenched within His being. You cannot assail that law without an attack on God. You cannot rise against the throne without setting yourself against the existence of God. Every sinner is, in intent, a Deicide. And in every “carnal mind” there is positive enmity to the very being of God. This may not be a reality in your consciousness, but it is the root of all your action in transgressing the law of God. Roots are usually hidden, and why is this “root of bitterness” undiscovered by you? It is because you keep so far away from God that you have no opportunity of discovering how you are affected towards Him. But if you were pressed by the law’s claims, and overwhelmed by the terrors of its curse, if you were left for a season without any conscious hope of “escape from the wrath to come,” and at the same time were persuaded that there can be no withdrawal of these demands and terrors, till the justice of the unchangeable and Eternal God was satisfied, then would you find in your consciousness the stirring of an enmity to God, whose cry is, “Let there be no God.” How fearful the consciousness of this! And how bitter the remembrance of this when the glory of Jehovah was so revealed to you, and the riches of His pardoning mercy, that, while having hope in Him, you went forth in loving desire after Him! But whether you are conscious of this enmity towards the very being of God or not, of all the sin in your action this is the root in your heart.

**II.** But the Psalmist confesses that he had done “**this evil in**” *His “sight”* as surely as he had sinned *against the Lord*.

1. It was in His sight, *for it was done under His all-seeing eye*. Nothing can be done anywhere, at any time, or by any one that is not fully observed by God. And is the eye of God to be no check upon us? A child sometimes may take liberties because his father cannot see him. He acts dishonestly who acts thus. But the child who has, as his father, one entitled to both his love and respect, acts most presumptuously if he is not restrained by knowing that such a father’s eye is on him. If he refuses to be careful because his parent’s eye is on him, he is both callous and presumptuous. But think of your being as completely watched by the Omniscient as if

there was no other being on which He had to rest His eye, and, while thus the object of His undivided attention, trampling His law under foot! O the marvellous long-suffering of God!

2. It was done in His sight, *because done before His omnipresence*. It is the glory of God that, while He cannot be contained except in the infinite and Eternal immensity of His own being, He, in His infinite being and in all His moral glory, can be in every spot throughout all the universe, and therefore is thus present where thou art sinning. You cannot find a place to sin but in the presence of His majesty and glory. O think of how God is thus insulted to His face whenever and wherever thou art committing sin!

3. It is done in His sight, *for it is done when He is near to you in the action of His providence*. At the very moment when you are sinning He is putting forth His power in upholding you, and each token of His goodness, conveyed to you by the operation of His power — and conveyed to you at that moment — you use, as they reach your hand, as a weapon wherewith to contend with Him! It is while you “live, move, and have your being in Him” you are transgressing His holy law!

4. It is done in His sight by you, *for it is done by you when He is near to you in the gospel* — while He stands and knocks at your door. O think of the glory which He hath revealed, and which shines from “the face of Jesus Christ,” of the love which He has commended, and of which He testifies to you, of the precious blood of His Son “shed for the remission of sins,” of the “great salvation” which in Christ He presents to you, of the urgent calls addressed to you authoritatively requiring your acceptance of “His unspeakable gift,” and of His patience in still continuing to plead with you, and then consider what must be implied in your doing evil in His sight when He has thus approached you!

5. In the case of David, and in that of every child of God, sin is committed in His sight, *because done by one who was brought near to Him by being adopted into His family*. Child of God, never approach to think that the grace which you have received can extenuate the guilt which you contract by law-breaking. Instead of this, your privileges as a child give you a power which no other has of aggravating your sin. No sin can be greater than yours. Is there nothing in the glorious greatness and rich grace of your Father to make you specially afraid of sinning? And surely there are no

circumstances in which sin so aggravated can be committed, as by him who does “evil” amidst the blessings which surround him in a state of grace, on whom shines light from above the mercy seat, and before whom walked his Elder Brother, leaving him an example that he should follow His steps.

6. “This evil” was done by the Psalmist in His sight, *because it was done by one in whom dwelt the Holy Spirit*. This is, in a special sense, true of all sins committed by those who are “the temples of the Holy Ghost.” He is in them, and specially and graciously present with the life which He has begotten in them, and forth from beside His presence there comes forth the evil lusting, and under its influence, the “enticed” will goes forth in sinful action. How intensely aggravated sin thus issuing and “finished” must be! Combine thoughts of the majesty and holiness, with thoughts of the grace, of the Spirit’s presence in the heart, and then consider what doing “evil” in His sight must imply.

7. The Psalmist did “this evil” in the sight of the Lord, *because he had done it after enjoying intimate communion with Him*. His sinward movement began when he was lying on the bosom of divine love. And it began in his being lifted up in pride because of what he had enjoyed. How fearfully this aggravates his evil-doing! How ought his enjoyment of the light of God’s face to have attached him to his Father and to His law! But he came forth from His fellowship to sin. And he made his enjoyment, while near, a reason for departing, in his pride of heart, from “the fountain of living waters!”

### **Application**

1. *Mark well the difference between considering sin in its bearing on God, and viewing it merely in its bearing on yourself*. For this indicates the difference between a true and a counterfeit conviction of sin. You may be much afflicted by a sense of the danger to which you have exposed yourself by sinning, and from that danger you may be most intensely anxious to escape. To secure a sense of deliverance from death what would you not do, what not sacrifice of carnal indulgence, what not suffer that would be penance to the flesh? But there is no such view of sin before your mind as constrains you to justify God in condemning you to death, as persuades you that there can be no hope for you unless the name of God, which you dishonoured, shall be glorified, as shuts you up to



the cross of Christ as the only channel through which pardoning mercy can flow out from God to you as a sinner, or as enables you to have any right conception of the grace to which alone you may hopefully appeal. Only the man who heartily confesses “Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight,” can heartily add a vindication of divine justice such as we have in the words, “That Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest,” can honestly cry for the application of atoning blood, or can make a guileless appeal to the loving-kindness and mercy of the Lord.

2. *Almost all religious errors spring from defective views of sin, as these are the result of defective views of God.* In these days it is becoming common to ignore all divine attributes but love, and so to conceive of divine love as something utterly inconsistent with His righteousness and holiness, and as therefore requiring the removal of all impressions of these which the revelations of the Old Testament and the true doctrine of the cross are fitted to produce. And all relations between God and men, such as are indicated in Scripture, are kept out of sight, and for all these there is substituted a supposed relation of universal fatherhood on the part of God, the faith of which is all that is required to make men safe and happy. Towards this is the drift of religious thought in these days, though only in a few instances as the position indicated been reached. Against this rationalised scheme of grace all would do well to be on their guard. It may for a season act as a sedative, but just as surely it will act as a deadly poison. Know God, and know sin as against Him, and attain to some acquaintance with the mystery of the cross, then the plausible sophistries of rationalistic teachers will fail to draw thee aside from “the old paths” in which the fathers walked with God.

3. *Only a heart in which there is love to God can be duly affected by viewing sin as against Him.* Only from such a heart can true repentance flow. Let your prayer then be, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.”

### **Justification by Faith**

***“To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” Romans 4:5.***

Such is the great doctrine of the first part of this great epistle. All,

both Jews and Gentiles, were proved to be sinners under a sentence of death. All, therefore, were shown to need justification, and the impossibility of attaining this blessing through the deeds of the law was conclusively established. Already under condemnation, and utterly unable, to any extent, to meet the claims of the law, how could “the ungodly” be justified by working out a righteousness of their own? Therefore justification, such as sets one free from condemnation and secures a right to everlasting life, must flow from the grace of God. From no other source can it come. But it cannot be, except on the ground of a righteousness which has magnified the law of God and fully met all the demands of divine justice. Such a righteousness only God could provide. And He did provide it, for He “sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (Gal. 4:4), to yield to the law all it claims as obedience, and, by enduring the penalty of death, to satisfy all the demands of justice. Him “God,” in the gospel, “hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time, His righteousness; that He might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom.3:25-26). The righteousness thus provided by God, and with this design, is presented in Christ as a divine gift to all sinners to whom the gospel comes. It is only by faith that it can be received; and it is thus received by one who is “ungodly,” and who regards himself as such; and even the faith which receives the righteousness is as surely “the gift of God” as is the righteousness which it appropriates. Thus justification is all of grace. This is no new doctrine, for the Apostle proves that it is the doctrine of the Old Testament as surely as of the New. He shows this by what is told of Abraham’s justification, and by what is taught regarding it in the book of Psalms.

The question is asked, in the first verse of this chapter – “What shall we say then that Abraham our father, according to the flesh, hath found?” His justification that he was His friend; and to the mode in which he was justified must all instances of justification correspond. “If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory” (verse 2), for then he must have been justified, not as “ungodly,” but as godly. But no such ground of glorying had even “the father of the faithful,” for regarding him it is declared that he had no righteousness but that which is attained through faith –

“Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (verse 3). If so, then he owed his justification wholly to the grace of God, 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” (verses 4, 5).

In directing your attention to the teaching of this text, let us consider: I. The three things affirmed regarding him who is justified – that he is **“ungodly,”** that he **“worketh not,”** and that he **“believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly;”** and II. What his justification by God implies.

I. The three things affirmed regarding him who is justified – that he is **“ungodly,”** that he **“worketh not,”** and that he **“believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly;”**

### **The Justified was “Ungodly”**

If we regard this word as referring to his disposition towards God Himself rather than to his state in relation to His judicial authority, what he was as to his personal relation to God must underlie the description of his state of feeling towards Him, and must be taken into account when we think of what justification implies. He could not be justified by grace unless he were a lawbreaker under sentence of death. It was because of this he needed to be justified, and only as such could be justified to the effect of receiving a free and full remission of his sins. And when we think of his personal relation to the law of God, we must consider him as utterly incapable of meeting its claims – as capable only of transgressing it, as one who is under the reigning power of sin. To such a one it is utterly indispensable that he be supplied with a righteousness, wrought out by another, by which the law, dishonoured by him as its transgressor, has been magnified and made honourable. But if thus supplied with righteousness, then he owes to grace the blessing of an interest in God’s favour, and of being, in consequence, entitled to everlasting life.

But the word “ungodly,” if viewed as indicating the disposition towards God of him who is justified, tells us that there is no kindly feeling towards God within his soul, and nothing in his heart from which any true homage to God can flow. Instead of this being so, he

is fully fraught with enmity to God. This God knows, and has it full before his mind, when He passes the act of justification in his favour. There can therefore be nothing in his disposition towards God to induce a favourable consideration of his state. All the outcome of his heart in action is dishonouring to God, and is an expression of enmity against Him.

But the word “ungodly” may be viewed as describing all he is in relation to this great “act of God’s free grace.” It represents him as a convicted transgressor, lying under the law’s curse, as a slave of sin, that will not cease from iniquity, and that must therefore, if not renewed, continue to be a lawbreaker, and as one who is an enemy to God, as well as one who deserves to be treated as an enemy by Him. Such is he who is justified, as he is *in himself*, in relation to the justifying act of God. *Being such* he is justified, and only *as such* could he be pardoned and accepted.

### **The Justified “*Worketh not*”**

The *second* thing told us regarding him is, that he “*worketh not.*” This, of course, implies that there is no consideration of any works of his by God, as a ground, to any extent, of His action in justifying him, nor as an inducement to bestow the blessing which that action secures. He is viewed by God simply as he is, “ungodly,” and, as such, needing and not meriting the blessing, when He secures his being “in Christ,” and justifies him as “the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

But the words “worketh not,” taken in connection with the words which follow, teach us more than this. No man begins to *believe* till he has *ceased to work*, in order to the attainment of righteousness. Naturally, when affected to any extent by a sense of guilt exposing to death, men betake themselves to self-righteous labour, expecting thereby to win the favour of God, as well as to avert his wrath. While working thus, a man departs from the only foundation of acceptance with God. While endeavouring to establish his own “righteousness,” he will not submit to “the righteousness which is of God.” From all that working he must cease ere he “believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly.” Pursued by the law’s curse and the law’s claims at once, he discovers that he cannot possibly escape the one, nor meet with obedience the other. He therefore cannot work on in hope. He is constrained to give up the desperate task with which he

charged himself, and to abandon all hope, and to cease from working at once. But it is only his hand that has been withdrawn, and that only because the coming of “the commandment” with power to his soul constrained him to do so. His heart goeth forth in its desire to be independent of grace and of God as before, but he dares not to cherish as an expectation what is the object of his desire. He knows now that to be independent of grace is to remain a “child of wrath” – an heir of hell. To cause his heart to cease from working requires another operation of the Holy Ghost than that which stopped his hand. Unless he is renewed in the spirit of his mind, never will he be disposed to be a debtor to Christ for righteousness, and to the grace which reigns through that “righteousness,” for pardon and acceptance.

### **The Justified “*Believeth on Him that Justifieth the Ungodly*”**

The *third* thing told us regarding him who is justified is that he “*believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly.*” In directing attention to this let us consider 1. The object; and 2. The exercise of the faith, with which justification is connected.

1. The object towards whom faith is directed – “*God who justifieth the ungodly.*” While under a work of conviction the man well knew that it was with God he had to do. He knew that the sentence of death lying upon him was passed by God, as “the Judge of all.” He knew, too, that only He who passed, could cancel, or remove it. He knew, too, that he was entirely at the disposal of God, as Sovereign, and that death or life to him was an alternative of which He must dispose, who hath “mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth” (Rom. 9:18). Hope towards Him who was His Judge and His Sovereign, alone could relieve him. He was thoroughly persuaded of this. But while knowing God only as His awful glory was revealed through the commandments and curse of the law, which he had broken, how could he have hope? He has ceased from hoping as surely as he has ceased from working. He has tried the only way to life in which his heart was disposed to move, and he met the sharp sword of justice aflame with the awful fire of divine wrath, and despair closed upon his heart, and he fainted in his utter helplessness, while he shivered all over, and all through, with the fear of death.

He has verily ceased from working, so far as any hopeful self-

righteous labour is concerned, but much is required in order that he may begin to believe. There must be revealed to him another than himself – one quite apart from himself – whom God has provided as a Saviour to meet such a case as his. This is done, in his great time of need, by the Holy Spirit. His mind is enlightened to discover, in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God, who acted the part of Surety for the unjust, satisfying the justice, magnifying the law and glorifying the name of God, and thus working out a righteousness on the ground of which God may justify the ungodly. Renewing that sinner’s will, He caused his desire to go forth towards Christ, so that he now fain would “win Christ, and be found in Him” (Phil. 3:8, 9). And, applying to his heart with power the call of God in the gospel, He persuaded and enabled him to “embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the gospel.” Thus, and only thus, did he reach in faith the Christ of God and only through Him, as “the way, and the truth, the life,” can he ever come to God – only through the “new and living way” can he ever enter into the holiest – only “by Christ” can he “believe in God.”

2. But through Christ he “*believeth* on God that justifieth the ungodly.” No faith that reacheth not God, through Christ, the Mediator, can possibly relieve him. It is with Him, in the matter of justification, he has to do. “It is God that justifieth,” and unless I have hope that HE shall justify ME, of what avail is all hope besides?

But this faith is exercised “on God that *justifieth*,” and on Him as justifying “*the ungodly*.”

It bears on God as *Justifier*. The believer knew right well before that it was impossible for God to justify, unless the dishonoured law was magnified, and all the demands of His justice were satisfied by an exhaustive execution of the penalty of death. This truth, conviction of sin burnt deep into his understanding and conscience. There can therefore be no faith directed towards God, unless the soul discovers how God *may* justify a sinner. How He can do so, in consistency with all He is, and has said, and has done can only be discovered in the light which emanates from the cross of Christ. There is “His own Son” whom He hath set apart as His Lamb, having finished His work of obedience to the law during three and thirty years of His life as the “man of sorrows,” and having in His death exhausted the curse of “the law of works.” Infinitely precious

is His obedience, as the obedience in human nature of Jehovah the Son of God, and infinitely precious His suffering in the flesh, as that of Him who is “God over all, blessed for ever.” It is as this is discerned that he discovers how God may justify – how, on the ground of Christ’s sufferings, He may pardon iniquity, and, on that of His obedience, may receive even a child of wrath into His favour. Yet it is only as he can lay hold of Christ by faith, and appropriate in Him His Surety righteousness, that he can look at all trustingly towards God, and have any hope of His favour. But resting in faith on the finished work of Christ, and discovering how God, acting on the ground of His righteousness, may be glorified in justifying a sinner, he begins to “believe on God.”

And his faith in God regards Him as One “that justifieth *the ungodly*.” If that were not true, there could be no hope for him. He is “ungodly,” and he knows that he is. Of this at any rate he is assured, and therefore he needs to learn regarding the grace of God to the ungodly, as surely as he must know that He is glorified in justifying. It is the measure in which both these are apprehended that he can “believe on God.”

That God justifieth “*the ungodly*” – or that they whom God justifieth are “ungodly” – is proved by the provision which God hath made for securing the blessing. His Son was given to be the Surety of the unjust. He was given to “put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb. 7:26). If so, surely they were hell-deserving sinners for whom He was given. And think not of this gift as intended to meet the demands of His justice without thinking of it as an expression of His love. Imagine not that the care of God in providing a substitute tells only of His love of righteousness, and that pardon without atonement would be a more pronounced expression of His love to sinners. How exactly opposite to this is the truth. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” to be a Lamb for a sin-offering. This was the highest commendation of His love, and His love was thus first of all expressed in order that, through the slain Lamb, it might flow forth as saving grace towards all who were its objects.

The very act of justification implies that they who are justified are “ungodly,” because it secures a free pardon and acceptance in the righteousness of one whom God had given in order to work it out. Surely, then, those who are justified are, in relation to the act of God

in justification, utterly “ungodly.”

And the call and promise of the gospel connect justification with the “ungodly.” They, as such, are called to receive this blessing, and all who, as such, receive it, are assured that it shall be theirs for ever. Contemplating the commendation of His love to those who were ungodly, and yielding to His call, he that came to Christ and found righteousness in Him, “believeth on God,” and begins to taste the sweetness of peace with Him.

## II. What Justification Implies

It is an act of God securing that all on whom it bears are introduced into a state in which acceptance with God – an interest in His favour – is theirs for ever. Who can estimate the precious privilege of being in such a relation to God!

Let us inquire what must be involved in justification, in order that a sinner may attain to be at peace with God; and what secures the perpetuity of that blessing?

1. There can be no peace with God *while sin is unpardoned*. The liability to death caused by guilt, incurred through the transgression of the law, must be removed from the person of the sinner. Without this there can be no peace, for it is a divine sentence which has linked the guilty person and an accursed death together, and against all who are unforgiven “the face of God” must be “set.” You can have no peace with Him while He is against you, sinner. But against you he must be, till all your guilt is removed by a full pardon of all your sins; and this therefore must be involved in God’s act in justifying the ungodly.

2. But *there must be more than this*. An interest in God’s favour is indispensable, as well as the removal of all that exposed you to His wrath. One cannot be “at peace with Him” without this. But an interest in His favour you cannot have, unless there be placed to your account a righteousness, which has met the law’s claims, and has so met them that the law is magnified. But if such a righteousness is imputed to you, then God can accept you as righteous in His sight. This acceptance is the second element in the act of justification, and secures an interest in the favour of God. There is nothing now, connected with the name and government of God, to interpose between you and the friendly exercise, bearing on you, of the reign of the Most High.



The blessing, secured by the act of justification, endures for ever. If there was the removal of all that was known to God, as your guilt, and if you were accepted “as righteous in His sight,” this was done on the ground of an everlasting righteousness, and according to the behest of everlasting love. Christ merits, and grace desires, that it should be everlasting. And God purposed and promised that it should be so. Therefore, surely, everlasting it shall be.

### **Application**

I close by asking you a few questions suggested by this subject.

1. *Have you ever had such a sense of sin as sent you earnestly to work?* I ask this, because they are but few, who have been stirred out of the ease which is enjoyed by ignoring sin – by living “without the law.”

2. *Have you ever ceased from working?* Have you been constrained, by the pressure of the law’s claims to withdraw your hand, in hopelessness, from self-righteous labour, and have you ever been willing to cease from working, that you might find rest through faith in Christ?

3. *Have you ever truly believed on God?* Remember it is not enough that you think you have this faith. If you are wise, you will seek to be assured of this on evidence that will be sustained by God. There is no lack of faith in the visible church, but even there true faith is rare.

4. *What if you are not justified by God?* How can you endure to have guilt lying upon you, to have God against you, and to have the devouring mouth of hell open just before you? O, friend, seek to take your place as an “ungodly” sinner, in the presence of God, appeal to His mercy through Jesus, and be not content to keep away from the open bosom of his love in Christ.

5. *If you have been justified by faith, seek also to be justified by works, as one who professes to “believe on God that justifieth the ungodly.”* You are a great debtor, and let this move you to be a true subject, living to the praise of the King to whose sovereign grace you owe all salvation, and to whose sovereign authority it is always dutiful to submit.



## **What is Sin?**

*“Against thee, thee only,  
have I sinned, and done  
this evil in thy sight”*

**Psalm 51:4.**

## **Justification by Faith**

*“To him that worketh  
not, but believeth on him  
that justifieth the  
ungodly, his faith is  
counted for  
righteousness”*

**Romans 4:5.**