

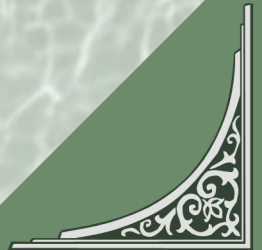


The Doctrine of Justification



Part One

A. W. Pink



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1. Introduction

2. Its Meaning

3. Its Problem

4. Its Basis

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1. Introduction

Our first thought was to devote an introductory chapter unto a setting forth the principle errors which have been entertained upon this subject by different men and parties, but after more deliberation we decided this would be for little or no profit to the majority of our readers. While there are times, no doubt, when it becomes the distasteful duty of God's servants to expose that which is calculated to deceive and injure His people, yet, as a general rule, the most effective way of getting rid of darkness is to let in the light. We desire, then, to pen these articles in the spirit of the godly John Owen, who, in the introduction to his ponderous treatise on this theme said, "More weight is to be put on the steady guidance of the mind and conscience of one believer, really exercised about the foundation of his peace and acceptance with God, than on the confutation of ten wrangling disputers. . . To declare and vindicate the truth unto the instruction and edification of such as love it in sincerity, to extricate their minds from those difficulties in this particular instance, which some endeavour to cast on all Gospel mysteries, to direct the consciences of them that inquire after abiding peace with God, and to establish the minds of them that do believe, are the things I have aimed at."

There was a time, not so long ago, when the blessed truth of Justification was one of the best known doctrines of the Christian faith, when it was regularly expounded by the preachers, and

when the rank and file of church-goers were familiar with its leading aspects. But now, alas, a generation has arisen which is well-nigh totally ignorant of this precious theme, for with very rare exceptions it is no longer given a place in the pulpit, nor is scarcely anything written thereon in the religious magazines of our day; and, in consequence, comparatively few understand what the term itself connotes, still less are they clear as to the ground on which God justifies the ungodly. This places the writer at a considerable disadvantage, for while he wishes to avoid a superficial treatment of so vital a subject, yet to go into it deeply, and enter into detail, will make a heavy tax upon the mentality and patience of the average person. Nevertheless, we respectfully urge each Christian to make a real effort to gird up the loins of his mind and seek to prayerfully master these chapters.

That which will make it harder to follow us through the present series is the fact that we are here treating of the *doctrinal* side of truth, rather than the practical; the judicial, rather than the experimental. Not that doctrine is *impracticable*; no indeed; far, far from it. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable (first) for *doctrine*, (and then) for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Doctrinal instruction was ever the foundation from which the Apostles issued precepts to regulate the walk. Not until the 6th chapter will any exhortation be found in the Roman Epistle: the first five are devoted entirely to doctrinal exposition. So again in the Epistle to the Ephesians: not until 4:1 is the first exhortation given. First the saints are reminded of the exceeding riches of God's grace, that the love of Christ may constrain them; and then they are urged to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called.

While it be true that a real mental effort (as well as a prayerful heart) is required in order to grasp intelligently some of the finer distinctions which are essential to a proper apprehension of this doctrine, yet, let it be pointed out that the truth of justification is far from being a mere piece of abstract speculation. No, it is a

statement of Divinely revealed fact; it is a statement of fact in which every member of our race ought to be deeply interested in. Each one of us has forfeited the favour of God, and each one of us needs to be restored to His favour. If we are not restored, then the outcome must inevitably be our utter ruin and hopeless perdition. How fallen creatures, how guilty rebels, how lost sinners, *are* restored to the favour of God, and given a standing before Him inestimably superior to that occupied by the holy angels, will engage our attention as we proceed with our subject.

As said Abram Booth in his splendid work “The Reign of Grace” (written in 1768), “Far from being a merely speculative point, it spreads its influence through the whole body of divinity (theology), runs through all Christian experience, and operates in every part of practical godliness. Such is its grand importance, that a mistake about it has a malignant efficacy, and is attended with a long train of dangerous consequences. Nor can this appear strange, when it is considered that this doctrine of justification is no other than the way of a sinner’s *acceptance with* God. Being of such peculiar moment, it is inseparably connected with many other evangelical truths, the harmony and beauty of which we cannot behold, while this is misunderstood. Till this appears in its glory, they will be involved in darkness. It is, if anything may be so called, a *fundamental* article; and certainly requires our most serious consideration” (from his chapter on “Justification”).

The great importance of the doctrine of justification was sublimely expressed by the Dutch Puritan, Witsius, when he said, “It tends much to display the glory of God, whose most exalted perfections shine forth with an eminent lustre in this matter. It sets forth the infinite *goodness* of God, by which He was inclined to procure salvation freely for lost and miserable man, ‘to the praise of the glory of His grace’ (Eph. 1:6). It displays also the strictest *justice*, by which He would not forgive even the smallest offense, but on condition of the sufficient engagement, or full satisfaction of the Mediator, ‘that He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus’ (Rom 3:26). It shows

further the unsearchable *wisdom* of the Deity, which found out a way for the exercise of the most gracious act of mercy, without injury to His strictest justice and infallible truth, which threatened death to the sinner: justice demanded that the soul that sinned should die (Rom. 1:32). Truth had pronounced the curses for not obeying the Lord (Deut. 28:15-68). Goodness, in the meantime, was inclined to adjudge life to some sinners, but by no other way than what became the majesty of the most holy God. Here wisdom interposed, saying, 'I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins' (Isa. 43:25). Nor shall you, His justice and His truth have any cause of complaint because full satisfaction shall be made to you by a mediator. Hence the incredible philanthropy of the Lord Jesus shineth forth, who, though Lord of all, was made subject to the law, not to the obedience of it only, but also to the curse: 'hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Ought not the pious soul, who is deeply engaged in the devout meditation of these things, to break out into the praises of a justifying God, and sing with the church, "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression" (Micah 7:18). O the purity of that holiness which chose rather to punish the sins of the elect in His only begotten Son, than suffer them to go unpunished! O the abyss of His love to the world, for which He spared not His dearest Son, in order to spare sinners! O the depth of the riches of unsearchable wisdom, by which He exercises mercy towards the penitent guilty, without any stain to the honour of the most impartial Judge! O the treasures of love in Christ, whereby He became a curse for us, in order to deliver us therefrom! How becoming the justified soul, who is ready to dissolve in the sense of this love, with full exultation to sing a new song, a song of mutual return of love to a justifying God.

So important did the Apostle Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, deem this doctrine, that the very first of his epistles

in the New Testament is devoted to a full exposition thereof. The pivot on which turns the entire contents of the Epistle to the Romans is that notable expression “the righteousness of God”—than which is none of greater moment to be found in all the pages of Holy Writ, and which it behooves every Christian to make the utmost endeavour to clearly understand. It is an abstract expression denoting the satisfaction of Christ in its relation to the Divine Law. It is a descriptive name for the material cause of the sinner’s acceptance before God. “The righteousness of God” is a phrase referring to the finished work of the Mediator as approved by the Divine tribunal, being the meritorious cause of our acceptance before the throne of the Most High.

In the succeeding chapters we shall examine in more detail this vital expression “the righteousness of God,” which connotes that perfect satisfaction which the Redeemer offered to Divine justice on the behalf of and in the stead of that people which had been given to Him. Suffice it now to say that that “righteousness” by which the believing sinner is justified is called “the righteousness of God” (Rom. 1:17; 3:21) because He is the appointer, approver, and imputer of it. It is called “the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:1) because He wrought it out and presented it unto God. It is called “the righteousness of faith” (Rom. 4:13) because faith is the apprehender and receiver of it. It is called “*man’s* righteousness” (Job 33:26) because it was paid for him and imputed to him. All these varied expressions refer to so many aspects of that one perfect obedience unto death which the Saviour performed for His people.

Yes, so vital did the Apostle Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, esteem this doctrine of Justification, that he shows at length how the denial and perversion of it by the Jews was the chief reason of their being rejected by God: see the closing verses of Romans 9 and the beginning of chapter 10. Again; throughout the whole Epistle to the Galatians we find the Apostle engaged in most strenuously defending and zealously disputing with those

who had assailed this basic truth. Therein he speaks of the contrary doctrine as ruinous and fatal to the souls of men, as subversive of the cross of Christ, and calls it another gospel, solemnly declaring “though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you... let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8). Alas, that under the latitudinal liberty and false “charity” of our day, there is now so little holy abhorrence of that preaching which repudiates the vicarious obedience of Christ which is imputed to the believer.

Under God, the preaching of this grand truth brought about the greatest revival which the Cause of Christ has enjoyed since the days of the Apostles. “This was the great fundamental distinguishing doctrine of the Reformation, and was regarded by all the Reformers as of primary and paramount importance. The leading charge which they adduced against the Church of Rome was that she had corrupted and perverted the doctrine of Scripture upon this subject in a way that was dangerous to the souls of men; and it was mainly by the exposition, enforcement, and application of the true doctrine of God’s Word in regard to it, that they assailed and overturned the leading doctrines and practices of the Papal system. There is no subject which possesses more of intrinsic importance than attaches to this one, and there is none with respect to which the Reformers were more thoroughly harmonious in their sentiments” (W. Cunningham).

This blessed doctrine supplies the grand Divine cordial to revive one whose soul is cast down and whose conscience is distressed by a felt sense of sin and guilt, and longs to know the way and means whereby he may obtain acceptance with God and the title unto the Heavenly inheritance. To one who is deeply convinced that he has been a life-long rebel against God, a constant transgressor of His Holy Law, and who realizes he is justly under His condemnation and wrath, no inquiry can be of such deep interest and pressing moment as that which relates to the means of restoring him to the Divine favour, remitting his sins, and fitting him to stand unabashed in the Divine presence:

till this vital point has been cleared to the satisfaction of his heart, all other information concerning religion will be quite unavailing.

“Demonstrations of the existence of God will only serve to confirm and more deeply impress upon his mind the awful truth which he already believes, that there is a righteous Judge, before whom he must appear, and by whose sentence his final doom will be fixed. To explain the moral law to him, and inculcate the obligations to obey it, will be to act the part of a public accuser, when he quotes the statutes of the land in order to show that the charges which he has brought against the criminal at the bar are well founded, and, consequently, that he is worthy of punishment. The stronger the arguments are by which you evince the immortality of the soul, the more clearly do you prove that his punishment will not be temporary, and that there is another state of existence, in which he will be fully recompensed according to his desert” (J. Dick).

When God Himself becomes a living reality unto the soul, when His awful majesty, ineffable holiness, inflexible justice, and sovereign authority, are really perceived, even though most inadequately, indifference to His claims now gives place to a serious concern. When there is a due sense of the greatness of our apostasy from God, of the depravity of our nature, of the power and vileness of sin, of the spirituality and strictness of the law, and of the everlasting burnings awaiting God’s enemies, the awakened soul cries out, “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” (Micah 6:6, 7). Then it is that the poor soul cries out, “*How then can* man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?” (Job 25:4). And it is in the blessed doctrine which is now to be before us that we are taught the method whereby a sinner may obtain peace with his Maker and rise to the possession of eternal life.

Again; this doctrine is of inestimable value unto the conscientious Christian who daily groans under a sense of his inward corruptions and innumerable failures to measure up to the standard which God has set before him. The Devil, who is “the accuser of our brethren” (Rev. 12:10), frequently charges the believer with hypocrisy before God, disquiets his conscience, and seeks to persuade him that his faith and piety are nought but a mask and outward show, by which he has not only imposed upon others, but also on himself. But, thank God, Satan may be overcome by “the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 12:11): by looking away from incurably depraved self, and viewing the Surety, who has fully answered for the Christian’s every failure, perfectly atoned for his every sin, and brought in an “everlasting righteousness” (Dan. 9:24), which is placed to his account in the high court of Heaven. And thus, though groaning under his infirmities, the believer may possess a victorious confidence which rises above every fear.

This it was which brought peace and joy to the heart of the Apostle Paul: for while in one breath he cried, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24), in the next he declared, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). To which he added, “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (verses 33-35). May it please the God of all grace to so direct our pen and bless what we write unto the readers, that not a few who are now found in the gloomy dungeons of Doubting Castle, may be brought out into the glorious light and liberty of the full assurance of faith.

2. Its Meaning

Deliverance from the condemning sentence of the Divine Law is the fundamental blessing in Divine salvation: so long as we

continue under the curse, we can neither be holy nor happy. But as to the precise nature of that deliverance, as to exactly what it consists of, as to the ground on which it is obtained, and as to the means whereby it is secured, much confusion now obtains. Most of the errors which have been prevalent on this subject arose from the lack of a clear view of the thing itself, and until we really understand what justification is, we are in no position to either affirm or deny anything concerning it. We therefore deem it requisite to devote a whole chapter unto a careful defining and explaining this word “justification,” endeavouring to show both what it signifies, and what it does not connote.

Between Protestants and Romanists there is a wide difference of opinion as to the meaning of the term “justify:” they affirming that to justify is to *make* inherently righteous and holy; we insisting that to justify signifies only to formally *pronounce* just or legally declare righteous. Popery includes under justification the renovation of man’s moral nature or deliverance from depravity, thereby confounding justification with regeneration and sanctification. On the other hand, all representative Protestants have shown that justification refers not to a change of moral character, but to a change of legal status; though allowing, yea, insisting, that a radical change of character invariably *accompanies* it. It is a legal change from a state of guilt and condemnation to a state of forgiveness and acceptance; and this change is owing solely to a gratuitous act of God, founded upon the righteousness of Christ (they having *none* of their own) being imputed to His people.

“We simply explain justification to be an acceptance by which God receives us into His favour and esteems us as righteous persons; and we say that it consists in the remission of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. . . Justification, therefore, is no other than an acquittal from guilt of him who was accused, as though his innocence has been proved. Since God, therefore, justifies us through the mediation of Christ, He acquits us, not by an admission of our personal innocence, but by an

imputation of righteousness; so that we, who are unrighteous in ourselves, are considered as righteous in Christ” (John Calvin, 1559).

“What is justification? Answer: Justification is an act of God’s free grace unto sinners, in which He pardoneth all their sins, accepteth and accounteth their persons righteous in His sight; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone” (Westminster Catechism, 1643).

“We thus define the Gospel justification of a sinner: It is a judicial, but gracious act of God, whereby the elect and believing sinner is absolved from the guilt of his sins, and hath a right to eternal life adjudged to him, on account of the obedience of Christ, received by faith” (H. Witsius, 1693).

“A person is said to be justified when he is approved of God as free from the guilt of sin and its deserved punishment; and as having that righteousness belonging to him that entitles to the reward of life” (Jonathan Edwards, 1750).

Justification, then, refers not to any subjective change wrought in a person’s disposition, but is solely an objective change in his standing in relation to the law. That to justify cannot possibly signify to make a person inherently righteous or good is most clearly to be seen from the usage of the term itself in Scripture. For example, in Proverbs 17:15 we read, “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD:” now obviously he who shall *make* a “wicked” person just is far from being an “abomination to the LORD,” but he who knowingly pronounces a wicked person to be righteous is obnoxious to Him. Again; in Luke 7:29 we read, “And all the people that heard Him, and the publicans, justified God:” how impossible it is to make the words “justified God” signify any moral transformation in His character; but understand those words to mean that they *declared* Him to be righteous, and all ambiguity is removed. Once more, in 1 Timothy 3:16 we are

told that the incarnate Son was “justified in (or “by”) the Spirit:” that is to say, He was publicly vindicated at His resurrection, exonerated from the blasphemous charges which the Jews had laid against Him.

Justification has to do solely with the *legal* side of salvation. It is a judicial term, a word of the law courts. It is the sentence of a judge upon a person who has been brought before him for judgment. It is that gracious act of God as Judge, in the high court of Heaven, by which He pronounces an elect and believing sinner to be freed from the penalty of the law, and fully restored unto the Divine favour. It is the declaration of God that the party arraigned is fully conformed to the law; justice exonerates him because justice has been satisfied. Thus, justification is that change of status whereby one, who being guilty before God, and therefore under the condemning sentence of His Law, and deserving of nought but an eternal banishment from His presence, is received into His favour and given a right unto all the blessings which Christ has, by His perfect satisfaction, purchased for His people.

In substantiation of the above definition, the meaning of the term “justify” may be determined, First, by its *usage in Scripture*. “And Judah said, What shall we say unto my lord? what shall we speak? or how shall we *clear* (this Hebrew word “*tsadag*” always signifies “justify”) ourselves?” (Gen. 44:16). Here we have an affair which was entirely a judicial one. Judah and his brethren were arraigned before the governor of Egypt, and they were concerned as to how they might procure a *sentence in their favour*. “If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them; then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked” (Deut. 25:1). Here again we see plainly that the term is a forensic one, used in connection with the proceedings of law-courts, implying a process of investigation and judgment. God here laid down a rule to govern the judges in Israel: they must not “justify” or pass a sentence in favour of the wicked: compare 1 Kings 8:31, 32.

“If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse” (Job 9:20): the first member of this sentence is explained in the second—”justify” there cannot signify to make holy, but to pronounce a sentence in my own favour. “Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu . . . against Job . . . because he justified himself rather than God” (Job 32:2), which obviously means, because he vindicated himself rather than God. “That Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest” (Psa. 51:4), which signifies that God, acting in His judicial office, might be pronounced righteous in passing sentence. “But wisdom is justified of her children” (Matt. 11:19), which means that they who are truly regenerated by God have accounted the wisdom of God (which the scribes and Pharisees reckoned foolishness) to be, as it really is, consummate wisdom: they cleared it of the calumny of folly.

Second, The precise force of the term “to justify” may be ascertained by noting that it is the *antithesis of “to condemn.”* Now to condemn is not a process by which a good man is made bad, but *is the sentence* of a judge upon one because he is a transgressor of the law. “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD” (Prov. 17:15 and cf. Deut. 25:1). “For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matt. 12:37). “It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?” (Rom. 8:33, 34). Now it is undeniable that “condemnation” *is the passing of a sentence* against a person by which the punishment prescribed by the law is awarded to him and ordered to be inflicted upon him; therefore justification is the passing of a sentence in favour of a person, by which the *reward* prescribed by the law is ordered to be given to him.

Third, That justification is not an experimental change from sin to holiness, but a judicial change from guilt to no-condemnation may be evidenced by the *equivalent terms used for it*. For example, in Romans 4:6 we read, “Even as David also describeth

the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works:" so that legal "righteousness" is not a habit infused into the heart, but a gift transferred to our account. In Romans 5:9, 10 to be "justified by Christ's blood" is the same as being "reconciled by His death," and reconciliation is not a transformation of character, but the effecting of peace by the removal of all that causes offense.

Fourth, "From the fact that the judicial side of our salvation is propounded in Scripture under the figures of a *forensic trial and sentence*. (1) A judgment is supposed in it, concerning which the Psalmist prays that it may not proceed on the terms of the law: Psalm 143:2. (2) The Judge is God Himself: Isaiah 50:7, 8. (3) The tribunal whereon God sits in judgment is the Throne of Grace: Hebrews 4:16. (4) A guilty person. This is the sinner, who is so guilty of sin as to be obnoxious to the judgment of God: Romans 3:18. (5) Accusers are ready to propose and promote the charge against the guilty person; these are the law (John 5:45), conscience (Rom. 2:15), and Satan: Zechariah 3:2, Revelation 12:10. (6) The charge is admitted and drawn up in a 'handwriting' in form of law, and is laid before the tribunal of the Judge, in bar to the deliverance of the offender: Colossians 2:14. (7) A plea is prepared in the Gospel for the guilty person: this is grace, through the blood of Christ, the ransom paid, the eternal righteousness brought in by the Surety of the covenant: Romans 3:23, 25, Daniel 9:24. (8) Hereunto alone the sinner betakes himself, renouncing all other apologies or defensatives whatever: Psalm 130:2, 3; Luke 18:13. (9) To make this plea effectual we have an Advocate with the Father, and He pleads His own propitiation for us: 1 John 2:1, 2. (10) The sentence hereon is absolution, on account of the sacrifice and righteousness of Christ; with acceptation into favour, as persons approved of God: Romans 8:33, 34; 2 Corinthians 5:21" (John Owen).

From what has been before us, we may perceive what justification *is not*. First, *it differs from regeneration*. "Whom He called, them He also justified" (Rom. 8:30). Though inseparably

connected, effectual calling or the new birth and justification are quite distinct. The one is never apart from the other, yet they must not be confounded. In the order of nature regeneration precedes justification, though it is in no sense the cause or ground of it: none is justified till he believes, and none believe till quickened. Regeneration is the act of the Father (James 1:18), justification is the sentence of the Judge. The one gives me a place in God's family, the other secures me a standing before His throne. The one is internal, being the impartation of Divine life to my soul: the other is external, being the imputation of Christ's obedience to my account. By the one I am drawn to return in penitence to the Father's house, by the other I am given the "best robe" which fits me for His presence.

Second, *it differs from sanctification*. Sanctification is moral or experimental, justification is legal or judicial. Sanctification results from the operation of the Spirit in me, justification is based upon what Christ has done *for me*. The one is gradual and progressive, the other is instantaneous and immutable. The one admits of degrees, and is never perfect in this life; the other is complete and admits of no addition. The one concerns my *state*, the other has to do with my standing before God. Sanctification produces a moral transformation of *character*, justification is a change of legal *status*: it is a change from guilt and condemnation to forgiveness and acceptance, and this solely by a gratuitous act of God, founded upon the imputation of Christ's righteousness, through the instrument of faith alone. Though justification is quite separate from sanctification, yet sanctification ever *accompanies* it.

Third, *it differs from forgiveness*. In some things they agree. It is only God who can forgive sins (Mark 2:7) and He alone can justify (Rom. 3:30). His free grace is the sole moving cause in the one (Eph. 1:7) and of the other (Rom. 3:24). The blood of Christ is the procuring cause of each alike: Matthew 26:28, Romans 5:9. The objects are the same: the persons that are pardoned are justified, and the same that are justified are pardoned; to whom

God imputes the righteousness of Christ for their justification to them He gives the remission of sins; and to whom He does not impute sin, but forgives it, to them He imputes righteousness without works (Romans 4:6-8). Both are received by faith (Acts 26:18, Rom. 5:1). But though they agree in these things, in others they differ.

God is said to be “justified” (Rom. 3:4), but it would be blasphemy to speak of *Him* being “pardoned”—this at once shows the two things are diverse. A criminal may be pardoned, but only a righteous person can truly be justified. Forgiveness deals only with a man’s acts, justification with the man himself. Forgiveness respects the claims of mercy, justification those of justice. Pardon only remits the curse due unto sin; in addition justification confers a title to Heaven. Justification applies to the believer with respect to the claims of the law, pardon with respect to the Author of the law. The law does not pardon, for it knows no relaxation; but God pardons the transgressions of the law in His people by providing a satisfaction to the law adequate to their transgressions. The blood of Christ was sufficient to procure pardon (Eph. 1:7), but His righteousness is needed for justification (Rom. 5:19). Pardon takes away the filthy garments, but justification provides a change of raiment (Zech. 3:4). Pardon frees from death (2 Sam. 12:13), but righteousness imputed is called “justification of life” (Rom. 5:18). The one views the believer as completely sinful, the other as completely righteous. Pardon is the remission of punishment, justification is the declaration that no ground for the infliction of punishment exists. Forgiveness may be repeated unto seventy times seven, justification is once for all.

From what has been said in the last paragraph we may see what a serious mistake it is to limit justification to the mere forgiveness of sins. Just as “condemnation” is not the execution of punishment, but rather the formal declaration that the accused is guilty and worthy of punishment; so “justification” is not merely the remission of punishment but the judicial

announcement that punishment cannot be justly inflicted—the accused being fully conformed to all the positive requirements of the law in consequence of Christ’s perfect obedience being legally reckoned to his account. The justification of a believer is no other than his being admitted to participate in the reward merited by his Surety. Justification is nothing more or less than the righteousness of Christ being imputed to us: the negative blessing issuing therefrom is the remission of sins; the positive, a title to the heavenly inheritance.

Beautifully has it been pointed out that “We cannot separate from Immanuel His own essential excellency. We may see Him bruised and given like beaten incense to the fire, but was incense ever burned without fragrance, and only fragrance being the result? The name of Christ not only cancels sin, it supplies in the place of that which it has cancelled, its own everlasting excellency. We cannot have its nullifying power only; the other is the sure concomitant. So was it with every typical sacrifice of the Law. It was stricken: but as being spotless it was burned on the altar for a sweet-smelling savour. The savour ascended as a memorial before God: it was accepted for, and its value was attributed or imputed to him who had brought the vicarious victim. If therefore, we reject the imputation of righteousness, we reject sacrifice as revealed in Scripture; for Scripture knows of no sacrifice whose efficacy is so exhausted in the removal of guilt as to leave nothing to be presented in acceptableness before God” (B. W. Newton).

“What is placing our righteousness in the obedience of Christ, but asserting that we are accounted righteous only because His obedience is accepted for us as if it were our own? Wherefore Ambrose appears to me to have very beautifully exemplified this righteousness in the benediction of Jacob: that as he, who had on his own account no claim to the privileges of primogeniture, being concealed in his brother’s habit, and invested with his garment, which diffused a most excellent odour, insinuated himself into the favour of his father, that he might receive the

benediction to his own advantage, under the character of another; so we shelter ourselves under the precious purity of Christ” (John Calvin).

3. Its Problem

In this and the following chapter our aim will be fourfold. First, to demonstrate the impossibility of any sinner obtaining acceptance and favour with God on the ground of his own performances. Second, to show that the saving of a sinner presented a problem which nought but omniscience could solve, but that the consummate wisdom of God has devised a way whereby He can pronounce righteous a guilty transgressor of His Law without impeaching His veracity, sullyng His holiness, or ignoring the claims of justice; yea, in such a way that all His perfections have been displayed and magnified, and the Son of His love glorified. Third, point out the sole ground on which an awakened conscience can find solid and stable peace. Fourth, seek to give God’s children a clearer understanding of the exceeding riches of Divine grace, that their hearts may be drawn out in fervent praise unto the Author of “so great salvation.”

But let it be pointed out at the onset that, any reader who has never seen himself under the white light of God’s holiness, and who has never felt His Word cutting him to the very quick, will be unable to fully enter into the force of what we are about to write. Yea, in all probability, he who is unregenerate is likely to take decided exception unto much of what will be said, denying that any such difficulty exists in the matter of a merciful God pardoning one of His offending creatures. Or, if he does not dissent to that extent, yet he will most likely consider that we have grossly exaggerated the various elements in the case we are about to present, that we have pictured the sinner’s condition in far darker hues than was warranted. This must be so, for he has no experimental acquaintance with God, nor is he conscious of the fearful plague of his own heart.

The natural man cannot endure the thought of being thoroughly

searched by God. The last thing he desires is to pass beneath the all-seeing eye of his Maker and Judge, so that his every thought and desire, his most secret imagination and motive, stands exposed before Him. It is indeed a most solemn experience when we are made to feel with the Psalmist, “O LORD, Thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassed my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, Thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me” (Psa. 139:1-5).

Yes, dear reader, the very last thing which the natural man desires is to be searched, through and through by God, and have his real character exposed to view. But when God undertakes to do this very thing—which He either will do in grace in this life, or in judgment in the Day to come—there is no escape for us. Then it is we may well exclaim, “Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into Heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in Hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me” (Psa. 139:7-11). Then it is we shall be assured, “Yea, the darkness *hideth not from* Thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee” (verse 12).

Then it is that the soul is awakened to a realization of *who it is* with whom it has to do. Then it is that he now perceives something of the high claims of God upon him, the just requirements of His Law, the demands of His holiness. Then it is that he realizes how completely he has failed to consider those claims, how fearfully he has disregarded that law, how miserably he falls short of meeting those demands. Now it is that he perceives he has been “a transgressor from the womb” (Isa. 48:8), that so far from having lived to glorify His Maker, he has

done nought but follow the course of this world and fulfil the lust of the flesh. Now it is he realizes that there is “no soundness” in him but, from the sole of the foot even unto the head, “wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores” (Isa. 1:6). Now it is he is made to see that all his righteousness are as “filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6).

“It is easy for any one in the cloisters of the schools to indulge himself in idle speculations of the merit of works to justify men; but when he comes into the presence of God, he must bid farewell to these amusements, for there the business is transacted with seriousness, and no ludicrous logomachy (*dispute about words*) practiced. To this point, then, must our attention be directed, if we wish to make any useful inquiry concerning true righteousness; how we can answer the celestial Judge, when He shall call us to an account. Let us place that Judge before our eyes, not according to the spontaneous imaginations of our minds, but according to the descriptions given of Him in the Scripture; which represents Him as one whose refulgence eclipses the stars, whose power melts the mountains, whose anger shakes the earth, whose wisdom takes the subtle in their own craftiness, whose purity makes all things appear polluted, whose righteousness even the angels are unable to bear, who acquits not the guilty, whose vengeance, when it is once kindled, penetrates even to the abyss of Hell” (John Calvin).

Ah, my reader, tremendous indeed are the effects produced in the soul when one is really brought into the presence of God, and is granted a sight of His awesome majesty. While we measure ourselves by our fellow men, it is easy to reach the conclusion that there is not much wrong with us; but when we approach the dread tribunal of ineffable holiness, we form an entirely different estimate of our character and conduct. While we are occupied with earthly objects we may pride ourselves in the strength of our faculty, but fix the gaze steadily on the midday sun and under its dazzling brilliance the weakness of the eye will at once become apparent. In like manner, while I compare myself with other sinners I can but form a wrong estimate of myself, but if I gauge

my life by the plummet of God's Law, and do so in the light of His holiness, I must "Abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6).

But not only has sin corrupted man's being, it has *changed his relation to God*: it has "alienated" him (Eph. 4:18), and brought him under His righteous condemnation. Man has broken God's Law in thought and word and deed, not once, but times without number. By the Divine tribunal he is pronounced an incorrigible transgressor, a guilty rebel. He is under the curse of his Maker. The law demands that its punishment shall be inflicted upon him; justice clamours for satisfaction. The sinner's case is deplorable, then, to the last degree. When this is painfully felt by the convicted conscience, its agonized possessor cries out, "*How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?*" (Job 25:4). How indeed! Let us now consider the various elements which enter into this problem.

The requirements of God's Law. "Every question therefore, respecting justification necessarily brings before us the judicial courts of God. The principles of those courts must be determined by God alone. Even to earthly governors we concede the right of establishing their own laws, and appointing the mode of their enforcement. Shall we then accord this title to man, and withhold it from the all-wise and almighty God? Surely no presumption can be greater than for the creature to sit in judgment on the Creator, and pretend to determine what should, or should not be, the methods of His government. It must be our place reverently to listen to His own exposition of the principles of His own courts, and humbly to thank Him for His goodness in condescending to explain to us what those principles are. As sinners, we can have no claim on God. We *do* have claim to a revelation that should acquaint us with His ways.

"The judicial principles of the government of God, are, as might be expected, based upon the absolute perfectness of His own holiness. This was fully shown both in the prohibitory and in the mandatory commandments of the law as given at Sinai. That

law prohibited not only wrong deeds and wrong counsels of heart, but it went deeper still. It prohibited even wrong desires and wrong tendencies, saying, ‘thou shalt not be concupiscent’—that is, thou shalt not have, *even momentarily*, one desire or tendency that is contrary to the perfectness of God. And then as to its positive requirements, it demanded the perfect, unreserved, perpetual surrender of soul and body, with all its powers, to God and to His service. Not only was it required, that love to Him—love perfect and unremitted—should dwell as a living principle in the heart, but also that it should be developed in action, and that unvaryingly. The mode also of the development throughout, was required to be as perfect as the principle from which the development sprang.

“If any among the children of men be able to substantiate a claim to perfectness such as this, the Courts of God are ready to recognize it. The God of Truth will recognize a truthful claim wherever it is found. But if we are unable to present any such claim—if corruption be found in us and in our ways—if in any thing we have fallen short of God’s glory, then it is obvious that however willing the Courts of God may be to recognize perfectness wherever it exists, such willingness can afford no ground of hope to those, who, instead of having perfectness, have sins and short-comings unnumbered” (B. W. Newton).

The indictment preferred against us. “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward” (Isa. 1:2-4). The eternal God justly charges us with having broken all His commandments—some in act, some in word, all of them in thought and imagination.

The enormity of this charge is heightened by the fact that

against light and knowledge we chose the evil and forsook the good: that again and again we deliberately turned aside from God's righteous Law, and went astray like lost sheep, following the evil desires and devices of our own hearts. Above, we find God complaining that inasmuch as we are his creatures, we ought to have obeyed Him, that inasmuch as we owe our very lives to His daily care we ought to have rendered Him fealty instead of disobedience, and have been His loyal subjects instead of turning traitors to His throne. No exaggeration of sin is brought against us, but a statement of fact is declared which it is impossible for us to gainsay. We are ungrateful, unruly, ungodly creatures. Who would keep a horse that refused to work? Who would retain a dog which barked and flew at us? Yet we have broken God's sabbaths, despised His reproofs, abused His mercies.

The sentence of the law. This is clearly announced in the Divine oracles, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10). Whoever violates a single precept of the Divine Law exposes himself to the displeasure of God, and to punishment as the expression of that displeasure. No allowance is made for ignorance, no distinction is made between persons, no relaxation of its strictness is permissible: "The soul that sinneth it shall die" is its inexorable pronouncement. No exception is made whether the transgressor be young or old, rich or poor, Jew or Gentile: "the wages of sin is death;" for "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom. 1:18).

The Judge Himself is inflexibly just. In the high court of Divine justice God takes the law in its strictest and sternest aspect, and judges rigidly according to the letter. "But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. . .Who will render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom. 2:2, 6). God is inexorably righteous, and will not show any partiality either to the law or to its transgressor. The Most High has determined that His Holy

Law shall be faithfully upheld and its sanctions strictly enforced.

What would this country be like if all its judges ceased to uphold and enforce the laws of the land? What conditions would prevail were sentimental mercy to reign at the expense of righteousness? Now God is the Judge of all the earth and the moral Ruler of the universe. Holy Writ declares that “justice and judgment,” and not pity and clemency, are the “habitation” of His “throne” (Psa. 89:14). God’s attributes do not conflict with each other. His mercy does not override His justice, nor is His grace ever shown at the expense of righteousness. Each of His perfections is given free course. For God to give a sinner entrance into Heaven simply because He loved him would be like a judge sheltering an escaped convict in his own home merely because he pitied him. Scripture emphatically declares that God, “will by no means clear the guilty” (Ex. 34:7).

The sinner is unquestionably guilty. It is not merely that he has infirmities or that he is not as good as he ought to be: he has set at nought God’s authority, violated His commandments, trodden His Laws under foot. And this is true not only of a certain class of offenders, but “all the world” is “guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19). “There is none righteous, no, not one: They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10, 12). It is impossible for any man to clear himself from this fearful charge. He can neither show that the crimes of which he is accused have not been committed, nor that having been committed, he had a right to do them. He can neither disprove the charges which the law preferred against him, nor justify himself in the perpetration of them.

Here then is how the case stands. The law demands personal, perfect, and perpetual conformity to its precepts, in heart and act, in motive and performance. God charges each one of us with having failed to meet those just demands, and declares we have violated His commandments in thought and word and deed. The law therefore pronounces upon us a sentence of condemnation,

curses us, and demands the infliction of its penalty, which is death. The One before whose tribunal we stand is omniscient, and cannot be deceived or imposed upon; He is inflexibly just, and swayed by no sentimental considerations. We, the accused, are guilty, unable to refute the accusations of the law, unable to vindicate our sinful conduct, unable to offer any satisfaction or atonement for our crimes. Truly, our case is desperate to the last degree.

Here, then, is the problem. How can God justify the wilful transgressor of His Law without justifying his sins? How can God deliver him from the penalty of His broken Law without compromising His holiness and going back upon His word that He will “by no means clear the guilty?” How can life be granted the guilty culprit without repealing the sentence “the soul that sinneth it shall die?” How can mercy be shown to the sinner without justice being flouted? It is a problem which must forever have baffled every finite intelligence. Yet, blessed be His name, God *has*, in His consummate wisdom, devised a way whereby the “chief of sinners” may be dealt with by Him as though he were perfectly innocent; nay more, He pronounces him *righteous*, up to the required standard of the law, and *entitled to the reward* of eternal life. How this can be will be taken up in the next chapter.

4. Its Basis

In our last chapter we contemplated the *problem* which is presented in the justifying or pronouncing righteous one who is a flagrant violator of the Law of God. Some may have been surprised at the introduction of such a term as “problem:” as there are many in the ranks of the ungodly who feel that the world owes them a living, so there are not a few Pharisees in Christendom who suppose it is due them that at death their Creator should take them to Heaven. But different far is it with one who has been enlightened and convicted by the Holy Spirit, so that he sees himself to be a filthy wretch, a vile rebel against God. Such an one will ask, seeing that the word of God so plainly

declares “there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination” (Rev. 21:27), how is it possible that I can ever gain admission into the heavenly Jerusalem? How can it be that one so completely devoid of righteousness as I am, and so filled with unrighteousness, should ever be pronounced just by a holy God?

Various attempts have been made by unbelieving minds to solve this problem. Some have reasoned that if they now turn over a new leaf, thoroughly reform their lives and henceforth walk in obedience to God’s Law, they shall be approved before the Divine Tribunal. This scheme, reduced to simple terms, is salvation by our own works. But such a scheme is utterly untenable, and salvation by such means is absolutely impossible. The works of a reformed sinner cannot be the meritorious or efficacious cause of his salvation, and that for the following reasons. First, no provision is made for his previous failures. Suppose that henceforth I never again transgress God’s Law, what is to atone for my past sins? Second, a fallen and sinful creature cannot produce that which is perfect, and nothing short of perfection is acceptable to God. Third, were it possible for us to be saved by our own works, then the sufferings and death of Christ were needless. Fourth, salvation by our own merits would entirely eclipse the glory of Divine grace.

Others suppose this problem may be solved by an appeal to the bare *mercy* of God. But mercy is not an attribute that overshadows all the other Divine perfections: justice, truth, and holiness are also operative in the salvation of God’s elect. The law is not set aside, but honoured and magnified. The truth of God in His solemn threats is not sullied, but faithfully carried out. The Divine righteousness is not flouted, but vindicated. One of God’s perfections is not exercised to the injury of any of the others, but all of them shine forth with equal clearness in the plan which Divine wisdom devised. Mercy at the expense of justice over-ridden would not suit the Divine government, and justice enforced to the exclusion of mercy would not befit the Divine

character. The problem which no finite intelligence could solve was how *both* might be exercised in the sinner's salvation.

A striking example of mercy *helpless* before the claims of the law occurs in Daniel 6. There we find that Darius, the king of Babylon, was induced by his nobles to sign a decree that any subject within his kingdom who should pray, or "ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days" save the king himself, should be cast into the den of lions. Daniel knowing this, nevertheless, continued to pray before God as hitherto. Whereupon the nobles acquainted Darius with his violation of the royal edict, which "according to the law of the Medes and Persians *altereth not*," and demanded his punishment. Now Daniel stood high in the king's favour, and he greatly desired to show clemency unto him, so he "set his heart on Daniel to deliver him, and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him." But he found no way out of the difficulty: the law *must* be honoured, so Daniel was cast into the lion's den.

An equally striking example of law helpless in the presence of mercy is found in John 8. There we read of a woman taken in the act of adultery. The scribes and Pharisees apprehended her and set her before Christ, charging her with the crime, and reminding the Saviour that "Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned." She was unquestionably guilty, and her accusers were determined that the penalty of the law should be inflicted upon her. The Lord turned to them and said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her;" and they, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, leaving the adulteress alone with Christ. Turning to her, He asked, "Woman, where are thine accusers, hath no man condemned thee?" She replied, "No man, Lord," and He answered, "Neither do I condemn thee, go, and sin no more."

The two adverse principles are seen *operating in conjunction* in Luke 15. The "Father" could not have the (prodigal) son at His table clad in the rags of the far country, but He could go out and meet him in those rags: He could fall on his neck and kiss him in

those rags—it was blessedly characteristic of His *grace* so to do; but to seat him at His table in garments suited to the swine-troughs would not be fitting. But the grace which brought the Father out to the prodigal “reigned” through that *righteousness* which brought the prodigal in to the Father’s house. It had not been “grace” had the Father waited till the prodigal decked himself out in suitable garments of his own providing; nor would it have been “righteousness” to bring him to His table in his rags. Both grace and righteousness shone forth in their respective beauty when the Father said “bring forth *the best robe*, and *put it on him*.”

It is through Christ and His atonement that the justice and mercy of God, His righteousness and grace, meet in the justifying of a believing sinner. In Christ is found the solution to every problem which sin has raised. In the Cross of Christ *every* attribute of God shines forth in its meridian splendour. In the satisfaction which the Redeemer offered unto God every claim of the law, whether preceptive or penal, has been fully met. God has been infinitely more honoured by the obedience of the last Adam than He was dishonoured by the disobedience of the first Adam. The justice of God was infinitely more magnified when its awful sword smote the beloved Son, than had every member of the human race burned for ever and ever in the lake of fire. There is infinitely more efficacy in the blood of Christ to cleanse, than there is in sin to befoul. There is infinitely more merit in Christ’s one perfect righteousness than there is demerit in the combined unrighteousness of all the ungodly. Well may we exclaim, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14).

But while many are agreed that the atoning death of Christ is the meritorious cause of His peoples’ salvation, there are now few indeed who can give any clear Scriptural *explanation of the way* and manner by which the work of Christ secures the justification of all who believe. Hence the need for a clear and full statement thereon. Hazy ideas at this point are both

dishonouring to God and unsettling to our peace. It is of first importance that the Christian should obtain a clear understanding of the *ground on which* God pardons his sins and grants him a title to the heavenly inheritance. Perhaps this may best be set forth under three words: substitution, identification, imputation. As their Surety and Sponsor, Christ entered the place occupied by His people under the law, so identifying Himself with them as to be their Head and Representative, and as such He assumed and discharged all their legal obligations: their liabilities being transferred to Him, His merits being transferred to them.

The Lord Jesus has wrought out for His people a perfect righteousness by obeying the law in thought and word and deed, and this righteousness is imputed to them, reckoned to their account. The Lord Jesus has suffered the penalty of the law in their stead, and through His atoning death they are cleansed from all guilt. As creatures they were under obligations to obey Gods' Law; as criminals (transgressors) they were under the death-sentence of the law. Therefore, to fully meet our liabilities and discharge our debts it was necessary that our Substitute should both obey and die. The shedding of Christ's blood blotted out our sins, but it did not, of itself, provide the "best robe" for us. To silence the accusations of the law against us so that there is now "no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" is simply a *negative* blessing: something more was required, namely, a *positive* righteousness, the keeping of the law, so that we might be entitled to its blessing and reward.

In Old Testament times the name under which the Messiah and Mediator was foretold is, "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer. 23:6). It was plainly predicted by Daniel that He should come here to "finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to *bring in everlasting righteousness*" (9:24). Isaiah announced "Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to Him shall men come; and all that are incensed against Him shall be ashamed. In the LORD

shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory” (45:24, 25). And again, he represents each of the redeemed exclaiming, “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness” (61:10).

In Romans 4:6-8 we read, “David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” Here we are shown the *inseparability* of the two things: God imputing “righteousness” and God not imputing “sins.” The two are never divided: unto whom God imputes not sin He imputes righteousness; and unto whom He imputes righteousness, He imputes not sin. But the particular point which we are most anxious for the reader to grasp is, *Whose* “righteousness” is it that God imputes or reckons to the account of the one who believes? The answer is, that righteousness which was wrought out by our Surety, that obedience to the law which was vicariously rendered by our Sponsor, even “the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:1). This righteousness is not only “unto all” but also “*upon* all them that believe” (Rom. 3:22). It is called “the righteousness *of God*” because it was the righteousness of the God-man Mediator, just as in Acts 20:28 His blood is call the *blood of God*.

The “righteousness of God” which is mentioned so frequently in the Roman epistle refers *not* to the essential righteousness of the Divine character, for *that* cannot possibly be imputed or legally transferred to any creature. When we are told in 10:3 that the Jews were “ignorant of God’s righteousness” it most certainly does not mean they were in the dark concerning the Divine rectitude or that they knew nothing about God’s justice; but it signifies that they were unenlightened as to the righteousness which the God-man Mediator had vicariously wrought out for His people. This is abundantly clear from the remainder of that

verse: “and going about to establish *their own righteousness*”—not their own rectitude or justice, but performing works by which they hoped to merit acceptance with God. So tightly did they cling to this delusion, they, “submitted not themselves unto the righteousness of God:” that is, they refused to turn from their self-righteousness and put their trust in the obedience and sufferings of the incarnate Son of God.

“I would explain what we mean by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. Sometimes the expression is taken by our divines in a larger sense, for the imputation of all that Christ did and suffered for our redemption whereby we are free from guilt, and stand righteous in the sight of God; and so implies the imputation both of Christ’s satisfaction and obedience. But here I intend it in a stricter sense, for the imputation of that righteousness or moral goodness that consists in the obedience of Christ. And by that obedience being imputed to us, is meant no other than this, that that righteousness of Christ is accepted for us, and admitted instead of that perfect inherent righteousness that ought to be in ourselves: Christ’s perfect obedience shall be reckoned to our account, so that we shall have the benefit of it, as though we had performed it ourselves: and so we suppose, that a title to eternal life is given us as the reward of this righteousness” (Jonathan Edwards).

The one passage which casts the clearest light upon that aspect of justification which we are now considering is 2 Corinthians 5:21, “For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” Here we have the counter imputations: of our sins to Christ, of His righteousness to us. As the teaching of this verse is of such vital moment let us endeavour to consider its terms the more closely. *How* was Christ “made sin for us?” By *God imputing to Him* our disobedience, or our transgressions of the law; in like manner, we are made “the righteousness of God in Him” (in Christ, not in ourselves) by *God imputing to us* Christ’s obedience, His fulfilling the precepts of the law for us.

As Christ “knew no sin” by inward defilement or personal commission, so we “knew” or had no righteousness of our own by inward conformity to the law, or by personal obedience to it. As Christ was “made sin” by having our sins placed to His account or charged upon Him in a judicial way, and as it was not by any criminal conduct of His own that He was “made sin,” so it is not by any pious activities of our own that we become “righteous:” Christ was not “made sin” by the infusion of depravity, nor are we “made righteous” by the infusion of holiness. Though personally holy, our Sponsor did, by entering our law-place, render Himself officially liable to the wrath of God; and so though personally unholy, we are, by virtue of our legal identification with Christ, entitled to the favour of God. As the consequence of Christ’s being “made sin for us” was, that “the LORD laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6), so the consequence of Christ’s obedience being reckoned to our account is that God lays righteousness “*upon* all them that believe” (Rom. 3:22). As our sins were the judicial ground of the sufferings of Christ, by which sufferings He satisfied Justice; so Christ’s righteousness is the judicial ground of our acceptance with God, by which our pardon is an act of Justice.

Notice carefully that in 2 Corinthians 5:21 it is *God* who “made” or legally constituted Christ to be “sin for us,” though as Hebrews 10:7 shows, the Son gladly acquiesced therein. “He was made sin by imputation: the sins of all His people were transferred unto Him, laid upon Him, and placed to His account and having them upon Him He was treated by the justice of God as if He had been not only a sinner, but a mass of sin: for to be made sin is a stronger expression than to be made a sinner” (John Gill). “That we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” signifies to be legally constituted righteous before God—justified. “It is a righteousness ‘in Him,’ in Christ, and not in ourselves, and therefore must mean the righteousness of Christ: so called, because it is wrought by Christ, who is God over all, the true God, and eternal life” (Ibid.).

The same counter-exchange which has been before us in 2 Corinthians 5:21 is found again in Galatians 3:13, 14, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ.” As the Surety of His people, Christ was “made under the law” (Gal. 4:4), stood in their law-place and stead, and having all their sins imputed to Him, and the law finding them all upon Him, condemned Him for them; and so the justice of God delivered Him up to the accursed death of the cross. The purpose, as well as the consequence, of this was “That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles:” the “blessing of Abraham” (as Rom. 4 shows) was justification by faith through the righteousness of Christ.

***“Upon a Life I did not live,
Upon a Death I did not die;
Another’s death, Another’s life
I’d rest my soul eternally.”***

The first of three booklets.

