

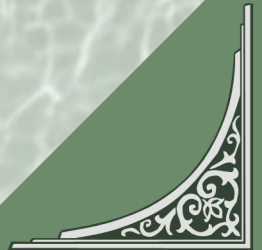


The Doctrine of Justification



Part Two

A. W. Pink



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5. Its Nature

6. Its Source

7. Its Objects

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5. Its Nature

Justification, strictly speaking, consists in God's imputing to His elect the righteousness of Christ, *that* alone being the meritorious cause or formal ground on which He pronounces them righteous: the righteousness of Christ is that to which God has respect when He pardons and accepts the sinner. By the *nature* of justification we have reference to the *constituent elements* of the same, which are enjoyed by the believer. These are, the non-imputation of guilt or the remission of sins, and second, of the investing of the believer with a legal title to Heaven. The alone ground on which God forgives any man's sins, and admits him into His judicial favour, is the vicarious work of his Surety—that perfect satisfaction which Christ offered to the law on his behalf. It is of great importance to be clear on the fact that Christ was “made under the law” not only that He might redeem His people “from the curse of the law” (Gal. 3:13), *but also* that they might “receive the adoption of sons” (Gal. 4:4, 5), that is, be invested with the privileges of sons.

This grand doctrine of Justification was proclaimed in its purity and clarity by the Reformers—Luther, Calvin, Zanchius, Peter Martyr, etc.; but it began to be corrupted in the seventeenth century by men who had only a very superficial knowledge of it, who taught that justification consisted merely in the removal of guilt or forgiveness of sins, excluding the positive admittance of man into God's judicial favour: in other words, they restricted justification unto deliverance from Hell, failing to declare that it also conveys a title unto Heaven. This error was perpetuated by

John Wesley, and then by the Plymouth Brethren, who, denying that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer, seek to find their title to eternal life in a union with Christ in His resurrection. Few today are clear upon the *twofold* content of Justification, because few today understand the nature of that righteousness which is imputed to all who believe.

To show that we have not misrepresented the standard teachings of the Plymouth Brethren on this subject, we quote from Mr. W. Kelly's "Notes on Romans." In his "Introduction" he states, "There is nothing to hinder our understanding 'the righteousness of God' in its usual sense of an attribute or quality of God" (page 35). But how could an "attribute" or "quality" of God be "upon all them that believe" (Rom. 3:22)? Mr. Kelly will not at all allow that the "righteousness of God" and "the righteousness of Christ" are one and the same, and hence, when he comes to Romans 4 (where so much is said about "righteousness" being *imputed* to the believer) he evacuates the whole of its blessed teaching by trying to make out that this is nothing more than our own faith, saying of Abraham, "his faith in God's word as that which he exercised, and which was accounted as righteousness" (page 47).

The "righteousness of Christ" which is imputed to the believer consists of that perfect obedience which He rendered unto the precepts of God's Law and that death which He died under the penalty of the law. It has been rightly said that, "There is the very same need of Christ's obeying the law in our stead, in order to the reward, as of His suffering the penalty of the law in our stead in order to our escaping the penalty; and the same reason why one should be accepted on our account as the other... To suppose that all Christ does in order to make atonement for us by suffering is to make Him our Saviour but in part. It is to rob Him of half His glory as a Saviour. For if so, all that He does is to deliver us from Hell; He does not purchase Heaven for us" (Jonathan Edwards). Should any one object to the idea of Christ "purchasing" Heaven for His people, he may at once be referred to Ephesians 1:14, where Heaven is expressly designated "the purchased possession."

The imputation to the believer's account of that perfect

obedience which his Surety rendered unto the law for him is plainly taught in Romans 5:18, 19, “Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” Here the “offence” or “disobedience” of the first Adam is set over against the “righteousness” or “obedience” of the last Adam, and inasmuch as the disobedience of the former was an actual transgression of the law, therefore the obedience of the latter *must* be His active obedience unto the law; otherwise the force of the Apostle’s antithesis would fail entirely. As this vital point (the chief glory of the Gospel) is now so little understood, and in some quarters disputed, we must enter into some detail.

The one who was justified upon his believing sustained a twofold relation unto God: first, he was a responsible creature, born under the law; second, he was a criminal, having transgressed that law—though his criminality has not cancelled his obligation to obey the law any more than a man who recklessly squanders his money is no longer due to pay his debts. Consequently, justification consists of two parts, namely, an acquittal from guilt, or the condemnation of the law (deliverance from Hell), and the receiving him into God’s favour, on the sentence of the law’s approval (a legal title to Heaven). And therefore, the ground upon which God pronounces him just is also a double one, as the one complete satisfaction of Christ is viewed in its two distinct parts: namely, His vicarious obedience unto the precepts of the law, and His substitutionary death under the penalty of the law, the merits of both being equally imputed or reckoned to the account of him who believes.

Against this it has been objected, “The law requires no man to obey and die too.” To which we reply in the language of J. Hervey (1750), “But did it not require a *transgressor* to obey and die? If not, then transgression robs the law of its right, and vacates all obligation to obedience. Did it not require the Surety for sinful men to obey and die? If the *surety* dies only, He only delivers

from penalty. But this affords no claim to *life*, no title to a *reward*—unless you can produce some such edict from the Court of Heaven. Suffer this, and thou shalt live.’ I find it written ‘In keeping Thy commandments there is great reward’ (Psa. 19:11), but nowhere do I read, ‘In undergoing Thy curse, there is the same reward.’ Whereas, when we join the active and passive obedience of our Lord—the peace-speaking Blood with the Life-giving righteousness—both made infinitely meritorious and infinitely efficacious by the Divine glory of His person, how full does our justification appear! How firm does it stand!”

It is not sufficient that the believer stand before God with no sins upon him—that is merely *negative*. The holiness of God requires a *positive* righteousness to our account—that His Law be perfectly kept. But we are unable to keep it, therefore our Sponsor fulfilled it for us. By the blood-shedding of our blessed Substitute the gates of Hell have been forever shut against all those for whom He died. By the perfect obedience of our blessed Surety the gates of Heaven are opened wide unto all who believe. My title for standing before God, not only without fear, but in the conscious sunshine of His full favour, is because Christ has been made “righteousness” unto me (1 Cor. 1:30). Christ not only paid all my debts, but fully discharged all my responsibilities. The law-Giver is my law-Fulfiller. Every holy aspiration of Christ, every godly thought, every gracious word, every righteous act of the Lord Jesus, from Bethlehem to Calvary, unite in forming that “best robe” in which the seed royal stand arrayed before God.

Yet sad to say, even so widely-read and generally-respected a writer as the late Sir Robert Anderson, said in his book, “The Gospel and Its Ministry” (Chapter on Justification by Blood), “Vicarious obedience is an idea wholly beyond reason; how could a God of righteousness and truth reckon a man who has broken law to have kept law, because some one else has kept it? The thief is not declared to be honest because his neighbour or his kinsman is a good citizen.” What a pitiable dragging down to the bar of sin-polluted human reason, and a measuring by worldly relations, of that Divine transaction wherein the “manifold wisdom of God”

was exercised! What is impossible with men is possible with God. Did Sir Robert never read that Old Testament prediction wherein the Most High God declared, “Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a *marvellous work* among this people, even a marvellous work and a *wonder*: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid” (Isa. 29:14)?

It is pointed out that, “In the human realm, both innocence and righteousness are transferable in their effects, but that in themselves they are untransferable.” From this it is argued that neither sin nor righteousness are in themselves *capable* of being transferred, and that though God treated Christ *as if He were* the sinner, and deals with the believer *as though he were* righteous, nevertheless, we must not suppose that either is actually the case; still less ought we to affirm that Christ *deserved* to suffer the curse, or that His people are entitled to be taken to Heaven. Such is a fair sample of the theological ignorance of these degenerate times, such is a representative example of how Divine things are being measured by human standards; by such sophistries is the fundamental truth of *imputation* now being repudiated.

Rightly did W. Rushton, in his “Particular Redemption,” affirm, “In the great affair of our salvation, our God stands single and alone. In this most glorious work, there is such a display of justice, mercy, wisdom and power, as never entered into the heart of man to conceive, and consequently, *can have no parallel* in the actions of mortals. ‘Who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside Me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside Me’ Isaiah 45:21.” No, in the very nature of the case no analogy whatever is to be found in any human transactions with God’s transferring our sins to Christ or Christ’s obedience to us, for the simple but sufficient reason that *no such union exists* between worldlings as obtains between Christ and His people. But let us further amplify this counter-imputation.

The afflictions which the Lord Jesus experienced were not only sufferings at the hands of men, but also enduring punishment at the hand of God: “it pleased the LORD to bruise Him” (Isa.

53:10); “Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the man that is My Fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: *smite the shepherd*” (Zech. 13:7) was His edict. But lawful “punishment” presupposes criminality; a righteous God had never inflicted the curse of the law upon Christ unless He had *deserved* it. That is strong language we are well aware, yet not stronger than what Holy Writ fully warrants, and things need to be stated forcibly and plainly today if an apathetic people is to be aroused. It was because God had transferred to their Substitute all the sins of His people that, *officially*, Christ deserved to be paid sin’s wages.

The translation of our sins to Christ was clearly typed out under the Law: “And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, (expressing *identification with* the substitute), and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat (denoting transference), and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: And the goat shall *bear upon him* all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited” (Lev. 16:21, 22). So too it was expressly announced by the Prophets: “The LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all... He shall bear their iniquities” (Isa. 53:6, 11). In that great Messianic Psalm, the 69th, we hear the Surety saying, “O God, Thou knowest My foolishness; and My sins are not hid from Thee” (verse 5)—how could the spotless Redeemer speak thus, unless the sins of His people had been *laid upon* Him?

When God imputed sin to Christ as the sinner’s Surety, *He charged Him with the same*, and dealt with Him accordingly. Christ could not have suffered in the stead of the guilty unless their guilt had been first transferred to Him. The sufferings of Christ were penal. God by act of transcendent grace (to us) laid the iniquities of all that are saved upon Christ, and in consequence, Divine justice finding sin upon Him, *punished Him*. He who will by no means clear the guilty must strike through sin and smite its bearer, no matter whether it be the sinner himself or One who vicariously takes his place. But as G. S. Bishop well said, “When justice once strikes the Son of God, justice exhausts

itself. Sin is amerced in an Infinite Object.” The atonement of Christ was contrary to *our* processes of law because it rose above their finite limitations!

Now as the sins of him who believes were, by God, transferred and imputed to Christ so that God regarded and treated Him accordingly—visiting upon Him the curse of the law, which is death; even so the obedience or righteousness of Christ is, by God, transferred and imputed to the believer so that God now regards and deals with him accordingly—bestowing upon him the *blessing* of the law, which is life. And any denial of that fact, no matter by whomsoever made, is a repudiation of the cardinal principle of the Gospel. “The moment the believing sinner accepts Christ as his Substitute, he finds himself not only freed from his sins, but *rewarded*: he gets all Heaven because of the glory and merits of Christ” (Rom. 5:17). The atonement, then, which we preach is one of absolute exchange (1 Pet. 3:18). It is that Christ took our place literally, in order that we might take His place literally—that God regarded and treated Christ as the Sinner, and that He regards and treats the believing sinner as Christ.

“It is not enough for a man to be pardoned. He, of course, is then innocent—washed from his sin—put back again, like Adam in Eden, just where he was. But that is not enough. It was required of Adam in Eden that he should actually *keep* the command. It was not enough that he did not break it, or that he is regarded, through the Blood, as though he did not break it. *He must keep it*: he must continue in all things that are written in the book of the law *to do* them. *How is this necessity supplied?* Man must have a righteousness, or God cannot accept him. Man must have a perfect obedience, or else God cannot reward him” (G. S. Bishop). That necessary and *perfect* obedience is to be found alone in that perfect *life*, lived by Christ in obedience to the law, *before* He went to the cross, which is reckoned to the believer’s account.

It is not that God treats *as* righteous one who is not actually so (that would be a fiction), but that He actually constitutes the believer so, not by infusing a holy nature in his heart, but by reckoning the obedience of Christ to his account. Christ’s

obedience is legally transferred to him so that he is now rightly and justly regarded as righteous by the Divine Law. It is very far more than a naked *pronouncement* of righteousness upon one who is *without* any sufficient foundation for the judgment of God to declare him righteous. No, it is a positive and judicial act of God “whereby, on the consideration of the mediation of Christ, He makes an effectual grant and donation of a true, real, perfect righteousness, even that *of Christ Himself* unto all that do believe, and accounting it as theirs, on His own gracious act, both absolves them from sin, and granteth them right and title unto eternal life” (John Owen).

It now remains for us to point out the *ground on which* God acts in this counter-imputation of sin to Christ and righteousness to His people. That ground was *the everlasting covenant*. The objection that it is unjust the innocent should suffer in order that the guilty may escape loses all its force once the covenant-headship and responsibility of Christ is seen, and the *covenant-oneness with Him* of those whose sins He bore. There could have been no such thing as a *vicarious sacrifice* unless there had been some *union* between Christ and those for whom He died, and that relation of union must have subsisted before He died, yea, before our sins were imputed to Him. Christ undertook to make full satisfaction to the law for His people because He sustained to them the relation of a *surety*. But what justified His acting as their surety? He stood as their Surety because He was their *substitute*: He acted *on their behalf*, because He stood *in their room*. But *what* justified the substitution?

No satisfactory answer can be given to the last question until the grand doctrine of everlasting covenant-oneness comes into view: that is the great underlying relation. The federal oneness between the Redeemer and the redeemed, the choosing of them *in Christ* before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), by which a legal union was established between Him and them, is that which alone accounts for and justifies all else. “For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are *all of one*: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Heb. 2:11). As the Covenant-

Head of His people, Christ was so related to them that their responsibilities necessarily became His, and we are so related to Him that His merits necessarily become ours. Thus, as we said in an earlier chapter, three words give us the key to and sum up the whole transaction: substitution, identification, imputation—all of which rest upon covenant-oneness. Christ was substituted *for us*, because He is one *with us*—identified with us, and we with Him. Thus God dealt with us as occupying Christ’s place of worthiness and acceptance. May the Holy Spirit grant both writer and reader such an heart-apprehension of this wondrous and blessed truth, that overflowing gratitude may move us unto fuller devotedness unto Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.

6. Its Source

Let us here review, briefly, the ground which we have already covered. We have seen, first, that “to justify” means to pronounce righteous. It is not a Divine work, but a Divine verdict, the sentence of the Supreme Court, declaring that the one justified stands perfectly conformed to all the requirements of the law. Justification assures the believer that the Judge of all the earth is for him, and not against him: that justice itself is on his side. Second, we dwelt upon the great and seemingly insoluble problem which is thereby involved: how a God of truth can pronounce righteous one who is completely devoid of righteousness, how He can receive into His judicial favour one who is a guilty criminal, how He can exercise mercy without insulting justice, how He can be gracious and yet enforce the high demands of His Law. Third, we have shown that the solution to this problem is found in the perfect satisfaction which the incarnate Son rendered unto Divine Law, and that on the basis of that satisfaction God can truthfully and righteously pronounce just all who truly believe the Gospel.

In our last article we pointed out that the satisfaction which Christ made to the Divine Law consists of two distinct parts, answering to the twofold need of him who is to be justified. First, as a responsible *creature* I am under binding obligations to keep the law—to love God with all my heart and my neighbour as

myself. Second, as a *criminal* I am under the condemnation and curse of that law which I have constantly transgressed in thought and word and deed. Therefore, if another was to act as my surety and make reparation for me, he must perfectly obey all the precepts of the law, and then endure the awful penalty of the law. That is exactly what was undertaken and accomplished by the Lord Jesus in His virtuous life and vicarious death. By Him every demand of the law was fulfilled; by Him every obligation of the believer was fully met.

It has been objected by some that the obedience of Christ could not be imputed to the account of others, for being “made under the law” (Gal. 4:4) as *man*, He *owed* submission to the law on His own account. This is a serious mistake, arising out of a failure to recognize the absolute uniqueness of the Man Christ Jesus. Unlike us, He was never placed under the Adamic Covenant, and therefore He owed nothing to the law. Moreover, the manhood of Christ never had a separate existence: in the virgin’s womb the eternal Son took the seed of Mary into union with His Deity, so that whereas the first man was of the earth, earthy, “the second Man is the *Lord from Heaven*” (1 Cor. 15:47), and as such He was infinitely superior to the law, owing nothing to it, being personally possessed of all the excellencies of Deity. Even while He walked this earth “in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”

It was entirely for His peoples’ sake that the God-man Mediator was “made under the law.” It was in order to work out for them a perfect righteousness, which should be placed to their account, that He took upon Himself the form of a servant and became “obedient unto death.” What has been said above supplies the answer to another foolish objection which has been made against this blessed truth, namely, that if the obedience of the Man Christ Jesus were transferable it would be available *only for one other man*, seeing that every human being is required to obey the law, and that if vicarious obedience be acceptable to God then there would have to be as many separate sureties as there are believers who are saved. That would be true if the “surety” were *merely*

human, but inasmuch as the Surety provided by God is the God-man Mediator, *His* righteousness is of infinite value, for the law was *more* “honoured and magnified” by the obedience of “the Lord from Heaven” than had every member of the human race perfectly kept it. The righteousness of the God-man Mediator is of *infinite* value, and therefore available for as many as God is pleased to impute it unto.

The value or merit of an action increases in proportion to the dignity of the person who performs it, and He who obeyed in the room and stead of the believer was not only a holy man, but the Son of the living God. Moreover, let it be steadily borne in mind that the obedience which Christ rendered to the law was entirely *voluntary*. Prior to His incarnation, He was under no obligation to the law, for He had Himself (being God) formulated that law. His being made of a woman and made under the law was entirely a *free act* on His own part. We come into being and are placed under the law without our consent; but the Lord from Heaven existed before His incarnation, and assumed our nature by His spontaneous act: “Lo, I come... I delight to do Thy will” (Psa. 40:7, 8). No other person could use such language, for it clearly denotes a *liberty* to act or not to act, which no mere creature possesses. Placing Himself under the law and rendering obedience to it was founded solely on His own voluntary deed. His obedience was therefore a “free will offering,” and therefore as He did not owe obedience to the law by any prior obligation, not being at all necessary for Himself, it is available for imputation to others, that they should be *rewarded for it*.

If, then, the reader has been able to follow us closely in the above observations, it should be clear to him that when Scripture speaks of God “justifying the ungodly” the meaning is that the believing sinner is brought into an entirely *new relation to the law*; that in consequence of Christ’s righteousness being made over to him, he is now absolved from all liability to punishment, and is given a title to all the reward merited by Christ’s obedience. Blessed, blessed truth for comforting the *conscientious* Christian who daily groans under a sense of his sad failures and who mourns

because of his lack of practical conformity to the image of Christ. Satan is ever ready to harass such an one and tell him his profession is vain. But it is the believer's privilege to overcome him by "the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 12:11)—to remind himself anew that Another has atoned for all his sins, and that despite his innumerable shortcomings he still stands "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6). If I am truly resting on the finished work of Christ for me, the Devil cannot successfully lay anything to my charge before God, though if I am walking carelessly He will suffer him to charge my conscience with unrepented and unconfessed sins.

In our last chapter, under the *nature* of justification, we saw that the constituent elements of this Divine blessing are two in number, the one being negative in its character, the other positive. The negative blessing is the cancellation of guilt, or the remission of sins—the entire record of the believer's transgressions of the law, filed upon the Divine docket, having been blotted out by the precious blood of Christ. The positive blessing is the bestowal upon the believer of an inalienable title to the *reward* which the obedience of Christ merited for him—that reward is life, the judicial favour of God, Heaven itself. The unchanging sentence of the law is "the man which doeth those things shall live by them" (Rom. 10:5). As we read in Romans 7:10, "the commandment, which was ordained to *life*." It is just as true that obedience to the law secured life, as disobedience insured death. When the young ruler asked Christ "what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" He answered, "If thou wilt enter into *life*, keep the commandments" (Matt. 19:16, 17).

It was because His people had failed to "keep the commandments" that the God-man Mediator was "made under the law," and obeyed it for them. And therefore its *reward* of "life" is due unto those whose Surety He was; yea, due unto Christ Himself to bestow upon them. Therefore did the Surety, when declaring "I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do" (John 17:4), remind the Father, "that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him" (verse

2). But more, on the footing of justice, Christ demands that His people be taken to Heaven, saying, “Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am” (John 17:24)—He *claims* eternal life *for His people* on the ground of His finished work, as the *reward* of His obedience.

“Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of One the free gift came upon all men unto *justification of life*” (Rom. 5:18). The offence of the first Adam brought down the curse of the broken law upon the whole human race; but the satisfaction of the last Adam secured the blessing of the fulfilled law upon all those whom He represented. Judgment unto condemnation is a law term intending eternal death, the wages of sin; the “free gift” affirms that a gratuitous justification is bestowed upon all its recipients—“*justification of life*” being the issue of the gift, parallel with “shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ” (verse 17). The sentence of justification adjudges and entitles its object unto eternal life.

Having now considered the two great blessings which come to the believer at his justification—deliverance from the curse of the law (death) and a title to the blessing of the law (life)—let us now seek to take a view of the originating *source* from which they proceed. This is the free, pure sovereign *grace* of God: as it is written “Being justified freely by His grace” (Rom. 3:24). What is grace? It is God’s unmerited and uninfluenced favour, shown unto the undeserving and hell-deserving: neither human worthiness, works or willingness, attracting it, nor the lack of them repelling or obstructing it. What could there be in me to win the favourable regard of Him who is of too pure eyes to behold evil, and move Him to justify me? Nothing whatever; nay, there was everything in me calculated to make Him abhor and destroy me—my very self-righteous efforts to earn a place in Heaven deserving only a lower place in Hell. If, then, I am ever to be “justified” by God it must be by pure grace, and that alone.

Grace is the very essence of the Gospel—the only hope for fallen men, the sole comfort of saints passing through much tribulation on their way to the kingdom of God. The Gospel is the

announcement that God is prepared to deal with guilty rebels on the ground of free favour, of pure benignity; that God will blot out sin, cover the believing sinner with a robe of spotless righteousness, and receive him as an accepted son: not on account of anything he has done or ever will do, but of sovereign mercy, acting independently of the sinner's own character and deserving's of eternal punishment. Justification is perfectly gratuitous so far as we are concerned, *nothing* being required of us in order to it, either in the way of price and satisfaction or preparation and meetness. We have not the slightest degree of merit to offer as the ground of our acceptance, and therefore if God ever does accept us it must be out of unmingled grace.

It is as “the God of all grace” (1 Pet. 5:10) that Jehovah justifies the ungodly. It is as “the God of all grace” He seeks, finds, and saves His people: asking them for nothing, giving them everything. Strikingly is this brought out in that word “being justified *freely* by His grace” (Rom. 3:24), the design of that adverb being to exclude all consideration of anything in us or from us which should be the cause or condition of our justification. That same Greek adverb is translated “without a cause” in John 15:25—“they hated Me without a cause.” The world's hatred of Christ was “*without* a cause” so far as *He* was concerned: there was nothing whatever in Him which, to the slightest degree, deserved their enmity against Him: there was nothing in Him unjust, perverse, or evil; instead, there was everything in Him which was pure, holy, lovely. In like manner, there is nothing whatever in us to call forth the approbation of God: by nature there is “no good thing” in us; but instead, everything that is evil, vile, loathsome.

“Being *justified without a cause* by His Grace.” How this tells out the very *heart* of God! While there was no motive to move Him, outside of Himself, there was one inside Himself; while there was nothing in us to impel God to justify us, His own grace moved Him, so that He devised a way whereby His wondrous love could have vent and flow forth to the chief of sinners, the vilest of rebels. As it is written, “I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy

transgressions *for Mine own sake*, and will not remember thy sins” (Isa. 43:25). Wondrous, matchless grace! We cannot for a moment look outside the grace of God for any motive or reason why He should ever have noticed us, still less had respect unto such ungodly wretches.

The first moving cause, then, that inclined God to show mercy to His people in their undone and lost condition, was His own wondrous grace—unsought, uninfluenced, unmerited by us. He might justly have left us all obnoxious to the curse of His Law, without providing any Surety for us, as He did the fallen angels; but such was His grace toward us that “He spared not His own Son.” “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by His *grace*, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:5-7). It was His own sovereign favour and good will which actuated God to form this wondrous scheme and method of justification.

Against what has been said above, it has been objected by Socinians and their echoists that this cannot be: if the believing sinner is justified upon the grounds of a full satisfaction having been made to God for him by a surety, then his discharge from condemnation and his reception into God’s judicial favour must be an act of pure *justice*, and therefore could not be by grace. Or, if it be purely an act of divine *grace*, then no surety can have obeyed the law in the believer’s stead. But this is to confound two distinct things: the relation of God to Christ the Surety, and the relation of God to me the sinner. It was *grace* which transferred my sins to Christ; it was justice which smote Christ on account of those sins. It was grace which appointed me unto everlasting bliss; it is *justice to Christ* which requires I shall enjoy that which He purchased for me.

Toward the sinner justification is an act of free unmerited favour; but toward Christ, as a sinner’s Surety, it is an act of justice that eternal life should be bestowed upon those for whom

His meritorious satisfaction was made. First, it was pure grace that God was *willing to accept* satisfaction from the hands of a surety. He might have exacted the debt from us in our own persons, and then our condition had been equally miserable as that of the fallen angels, for whom no mediator was provided. Second, it was wondrous grace that God Himself *provided* a Surety for us, which we could not have done. The only creatures who are capable of performing perfect obedience are the holy angels, yet none of them could have assumed and met our obligations, for they are not akin to us, possessing not human nature, and therefore incapable of dying. Even had an angel become incarnate, his obedience to the law could not have availed for the whole of God's elect, for it would not have possessed *infinite* value.

None but a Divine person taking human nature into union with Himself could present unto God a satisfaction adequate for the redemption of His people. And it was impossible for men to have found out that Mediator and Surety: it must have its first rise in God, and not from us: it was He that "found" a ransom (Job 33:24) and laid help upon One that is "mighty" (Psa. 89:19). In the last place, it was *amazing* grace that the Son was willing to perform such a work for us, without whose consent the justice of God could not have exacted the debt from Him. And His grace is the most eminent in that He knew beforehand all the unspeakable humiliation and unparalleled suffering which He would encounter in the discharge of this work, yet that did not deter Him; nor was He unapprised of the character of those for whom He did it—the guilty, the ungodly, the hell-deserving; yet He shrank not back.

***"O to grace how great a debtor,
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy grace, Lord, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee."***

7. Its Objects

We have now reached a point in our discussion of this mighty theme where it is timely for us to ask the question, *Who are the ones* that God justifies? The answer to that question will

necessarily vary according to the mental position we occupy. From the standpoint of God's eternal decrees the reply must be, *God's elect*: Romans 8:33. From the standpoint of the effects produced by quickening operations of the Holy Spirit the reply must be, *those who believe*: Acts 13:39. But from the standpoint of what they are, considered in themselves, the reply must be, *the ungodly* (Rom. 4:5). The persons are the same, yet contemplated in three different relations. But here a difficulty presents itself: If faith be essential in order to justification, and if a fallen sinner must be quickened by the Holy Spirit before he can believe, then with what propriety can a regenerated person, with the spiritual grace of faith already in his heart, be described as "ungodly?"

The difficulty pointed out above is self-created. It issues from confounding things which differ radically. It is the result of bringing in the *experimental* state of the person justified, when justification has to do only with his *judicial* status. We would emphasize once more the vital importance of keeping quite distinct in our minds the objective and subjective aspects of truth, the legal and the experimental: unless this be steadily done, nought but confusion and mistakes can mark our thinking. When contemplating what he is in *himself*, considered alone, even the Christian mournfully cries "O wretched man that I am;" but when he views himself *in Christ*, as justified from all things, he triumphantly exclaims, "who shall lay anything to my charge!"

Above, we have pointed out that from the viewpoint of God's eternal decrees the question "Who are the ones whom God justifies?" must be "the elect." And this brings us to a point on which some eminent Calvinists have erred, or at least, have expressed themselves faultily. Some of the older theologians, when expounding this doctrine, contended for the *eternal justification* of the elect, affirming that God pronounced them righteous before the foundation of the world, and that their justification was then actual and complete, remaining so throughout their history in time, even during the days of their unregeneracy and unbelief; and that the only difference their faith made was in *making manifest* God's eternal justification in their

consciences. This is a serious mistake, resulting (again) from failure to distinguish between things which differ.

As an *immanent* act of God's mind, in which *all* things (which are to us past, present, and future) were cognized by Him, the elect might be said to be justified from all eternity. And, as an *immutable* act of God's will, which cannot be frustrated, the same may be predicated again. But as an actual, formal, historical sentence, pronounced by God upon us, not so. We must distinguish between God's looking upon the elect in the *purpose* of his grace, and the objects of justification lying under the sentence of the law: in the former, He loved His people with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3); in the latter, we were "by nature the children of *wrath*, even as others" (Eph. 2:3). Until they believe, every descendant of Adam is "condemned already" (John 3:18), and to be under God's condemnation is the very opposite of being justified.

In his ponderous treatise on justification, the Puritan Thomas Goodwin made clear some vital distinctions, which if carefully observed will preserve us from error on this point. "1. In the everlasting covenant. We may say of all spiritual blessings in Christ, what is said of Christ Himself, that their 'goings forth are from everlasting.' Justified then we were when first elected, though not in our own persons, yet in our Head (Eph. 1:3). 2. There is a farther act of justifying us, which passed from God towards us in Christ, upon His payment and performance at His resurrection (Rom. 4:25, 1 Tim. 3:16). 3. But these two acts of justification are wholly out of us, immanent acts in God, and though they concern us and are *towards* us, yet not acts of God *upon* us, they being performed towards us not as actually existing in ourselves, but only as existing in our Head, who covenanted for us and represented us: so as though by those acts we are *estated* into a right and title to justification, yet the benefit and possession of that estate we have not without a farther act being passed upon us."

Before regeneration we are justified by existing in our Head only, as a feoffee (*one who is given a grant*), held in trust for us,

as children under age. In addition to which, we “are to be in our own persons, though still through Christ, possessed of it, and to have all the deeds and evidences of it committed to the custody and apprehension of our faith. We are in our own persons made true owners and enjoyers of it, which is immediately done at that instant when we first believe; which act (of God) is the completion and accomplishment of the former two, and is that grand and famous justification by faith which the Scripture so much inculcates—note the ‘now’ in Romans 5:9, 11; 8:11... God doth judge and pronounce His elect ungodly and unjustified till they believe” (Ibid.)

God’s elect enter this world in precisely the same condition and circumstances as do the non-elect. They are “by nature the children of wrath, *even as others*” (Eph. 2:3), that is, they are under the condemnation of their original sin in Adam (Rom. 5:12, 18, 19) and they are under the curse of God’s Law because of their own constant transgressions of it (Gal. 3:10). The sword of divine justice is suspended over their heads, and the Scriptures denounce them as rebels against the Most High. As yet, there is nothing whatever to distinguish them from those who are “fitted to destruction.” Their state is woeful to the last degree, their situation perilous beyond words; and when the Holy Spirit awakens them from the sleep of death, the first message which falls upon their ears is, “Flee from the wrath to come.” But how and whither, they, as yet, know not. Then it is they are ready for the message of the Gospel.

Let us turn now to the more immediate answer to our opening inquiry, Who are the ones that God justifies? A definite reply is given in Romans 4:5: “Him that justifieth the”—whom? the holy, the faithful, the fruitful? no, the very reverse: “Him that justifieth *the ungodly.*” What a strong, bold, and startling word is this! It becomes yet more emphatic when we observe what precedes: “But to him *that worketh* not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly.” The subjects of justification, then, are viewed in themselves, apart from Christ, as not only destitute of a perfect righteousness, but as having no acceptable works to their account.

They are denominated, and considered as *ungodly* when the sentence of justification is pronounced upon them. The mere *sinner* is the subject on which grace is magnified, toward which grace reigns in justification!

“To say, he who *worketh not* is justified through believing, is to say that his works, whatever they be, have *no* influence in his justification, nor hath God, in justifying him, any respect unto them. Wherefore he *alone* who worketh not, is the subject of justification, the person to be justified. That is, God considereth no man’s works, no man’s duties of obedience, in his justification; seeing we are justified *freely* by His grace” (John Owen). Those whom God, in His transcendent mercy, justifies, are not the obedient, but the disobedient; not those who have been loyal and loving subjects of His righteous government, but they who have stoutly defied Him and trampled His laws beneath their feet. Those whom God justifies are lost sinners, lying in a state of defection from Him, under a loss of original righteousness (in Adam) and by their own transgressions brought in guilty before His tribunal (Rom. 3:19). They are those who by character and conduct have no claim upon divine blessing, and deserve nought but unsparing judgment at God’s hand.

“Him that justifieth the *ungodly*.” It is deplorable to see how many able commentators have weakened the force of this by affirming that, while the subject of justification is “ungodly” up to the time of his justification, he is not so at the moment of justification itself. They argue that, inasmuch as the subject of justification is a *believer* at the moment of his justification and that believing presupposes regeneration—a work of divine grace wrought in the heart—he could not be designated “ungodly.” This seeming difficulty is at once removed by calling to mind that justification is entirely a *law* matter and not an experimental thing at all. In the sight of God’s law *every* one whom God justifies is “ungodly” until Christ’s righteousness is made over to him. The awful sentence “ungodly” rests as truly upon the purest virgin as much as it does upon the foulest prostitute until God imputes Christ’s obedience to her.

“Him that justifieth the ungodly.” These words cannot mean less than that God, in the act of justification, has no regard whatever to any thing good resting to the credit of the person He justifies. They declare, emphatically, that immediately prior to that divine act, God beholds the subject only as unrighteous, ungodly, wicked, so that no good, either in or by the person justified, can possibly be the ground on which or the reason for which He justifies him. This is further evident from the words “to him that worketh not:” that this includes not only works which the ceremonial law required, but *all works* of morality and godliness, appear from the fact that the same person who is said to “work not” is designated “ungodly.” Finally, seeing that the faith which belongs to justification is here said to be “counted for [or “unto”] righteousness,” it is clear that the person to whom “righteousness” is imputed, is *destitute* of righteousness in himself.

A parallel passage to the one which has just been before us is found in Isaiah 43. There we hear God saying, “I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins” (verse 25). And to whom does God say this? To those who had sincerely endeavoured to please Him? To those who, though they had occasionally been overtaken in a fault, had, in the main, served Him faithfully? No, indeed; very far from it. Instead, in the immediate context we find Him saying to them, “But thou hast not called upon Me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of Me, O Israel. Thou hast bought Me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled Me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made Me to serve with thy sins, thou hast *wearied Me with thine iniquities*” (verses 22, 24). They were, then, thoroughly “ungodly;” yet to *them* the Lord declared, “I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions”—why? Because of something good in them or from them? No, “for Mine own sake!”

Further confirmation of what has been before us in Romans 4:5 is found in both what immediately precedes and what follows. In verses 1-3 the case of Abraham is considered, and the proof given that he was *not* “justified by works,” but on the ground of righteousness being imputed to him on his believing. “Now if a

person of such victorious faith, exalted piety, and amazing obedience as his was, did not obtain acceptance with God on account of his own duties, but by an imputed righteousness; who shall pretend to an interest in the heavenly blessing, in virtue of his own sincere endeavours, or pious performances?—performances not fit to be named, in comparison with those that adorned the conduct and character of *Jehovah's friend*" (A. Booth).

Having shown that the father of all believers was regarded by the Lord as an "ungodly" person, having no good works to his credit at the moment of his justification, the Apostle next cited David's description of the truly blessed man. "And how does the royal Psalmist describe him? To what does he attribute his acceptance with God? To an inherent, or to an imputed righteousness? Does he represent him as attaining the happy state, and as enjoying the precious privilege, in consequence of performing sincere obedience, and of keeping the law to the best of his power? No such thing. His words are, 'Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin' (verses 7-9). The blessed man is here described as one who is, in himself, a polluted creature, and a guilty criminal. As one who, before grace made the difference, was on a level with the rest of mankind; equally unworthy, and equally wretched: and the sacred penman informs us that all his blessedness arises from an *imputed* righteousness" (A. Booth).

"Him that justifieth the ungodly." Here is the very heart of the Gospel. Many have argued that God can only pronounce just, and treat as such, those who are inherently righteous; but if this was so, what good news would there be for sinful men? Enemies of the Truth insist that for God to pronounce just those whom His law condemns would be a judicial fiction. But Romans 4:5 makes known a *divine* miracle: something only God could have achieved. The miracle announced by the Gospel is that God comes to the ungodly with a mercy that is righteous, and in spite of all their depravity and rebellion, enables them through faith (on the ground

of Christ's righteousness) to enter into a new and blessed relation with Himself.

The Scriptures speak of mercy, but it is not mercy coming in to make up the deficiencies and forgive the slips of the virtuous, but mercy extended *through Christ to the chief of sinners*. The Gospel which proclaims mercy through the atonement of the Lord Jesus is distinguished from every religious system of man, by holding out salvation to the *guiltiest* of the human race, through faith in the blood of the Redeemer. God's Son came into this world not only to save sinners, but even *the chief of sinners*, the worst of His enemies. Mercy is extended freely to the most violent and determined rebel. Here, and here only, is a refuge for the *guilty*. Is the trembling reader conscious that he is a *great* sinner, then that is the very reason why you should come to Christ: the greater your sins, the greater your need of the Saviour.

There are some who appear to think that Christ is a Physician who can cure only such patients as are not dangerously ill, that there are some cases so desperate as to be incurable, beyond His skill. What an affront to His power, what a denial of His sufficiency! Where can a more extreme case be found than that of the thief on the cross? He was at the very point of death, on the very brink of Hell! A guilty criminal, an incorrigible outlaw, justly condemned even by men. He had reviled the Saviour suffering by his side. Yet, at the end, he turned to Him and said, "Lord remember me." Was his plea refused? Did the Physician of souls regard him as a hopeless case? No, blessed be His name, He at once responded "Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." *Only unbelief* shuts the vilest out of Heaven.

"Him that justifieth the *ungodly*." And how can the thrice holy God righteously do such a thing? Because "*Christ died for the Ungodly*" (Rom. 5:6). God's righteous grace comes to us through the law-honouring, justice-satisfying, sin-atonement Work of the Lord Jesus! Here, then, is the very essence of the Gospel: the proclamation of God's amazing grace, the declaration of divine *bounty*, altogether irrespective of human worth or merit. In the great Satisfaction of His Son, God has "*brought near HIS*

righteousness” (Isa. 46:13). “We do not need to go up to Heaven for it; that would imply Christ had never come down. Nor do we need to go down to the depths of the earth for it; that would say Christ had never been buried and had never risen. It is near. We do not need to exert ourselves to bring it near, nor do anything to attract it towards us. It is near... The office of faith is not to work, but to *cease working*; not to do anything, but to own that *all is done*” (A. Bonar).

Faith is the one link between the sinner and the Saviour. Not faith as a work, which must be properly performed to qualify us for pardon. Not faith as a religious duty, which must be gone through according to certain rules in order to induce Christ to give us the benefits of His finished work. No, but faith simply extended *as an empty hand*, to receive everything from Christ for nothing. Reader, you may be the very “*chief* of sinners,” yet is your case not hopeless. You may have sinned against much light, great privileges, exceptional opportunities; you may have broken every one of the Ten Commandments in thought, word and deed; your body may be filled with disease from wickedness, your head white with the winter of old age; you may already have one foot in Hell; and yet even now, if you but take your place alongside of the dying thief, and trust in the *divine efficacy* of the precious blood of the Lamb, *you* shall be plucked as a brand from the burning. God “justifieth *the ungodly*.” Hallelujah! If He did not, the writer had been in Hell long ago.

The second of three booklets.

