

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

It is a help to the apprehension of the Christian doctrine of justification by faith, to keep in mind two things: (1) The source of the doctrine; and (2) The place of the doctrine in the steps of God, as He goes about saving a sinner.

(1) The source of the doctrine is in the supernaturally revealed word of God. No convincing argument has been discovered by the uninspired intellect that a just God will justify the ungodly. Much more the uninspired reason does not know intuitively that God will justify the ungodly. Certain ethical propositions can be validated by convincing arguments of the uninspired intellect, and certain other ethical propositions are known intuitively by the uninspired reason. But the great doctrines of grace cannot be thus reached by the natural reason. If man is ever to know them, God must supernaturally give him that knowledge. If God has devised a plan by which He can justify the ungodly, if God has determined to put that plan into operation, if He has disclosed all this to man, man can receive the disclosure. We are dependent, for the doctrine, on the word of God. Much is said, these days, about Christian experience as a basis of the doctrine; and, once a believer has been justified and has construed his experience of the effects of justification in the light of God-given teachings about justification and its effects, he does find that his experience vivifies and confirms the teaching of the word. But the supernaturally revealed word of God is the basis of the doctrine. If we had no valid, special revelation from God on the subject, we could have no solid foundation for the doctrine. We have, however, such a revelation in the *impregnable rock of sacred Scripture*.

(2) The place of justification in the order of those steps which God takes in saving a sinner, is proximately indicated in Rom. viii. 29-30: "For whom He foreknew" (*προέγνω*, i.e. meant to make His own) "He did fore-ordain to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren; and whom He did foreordain them He also effectually called, and whom He effectually called them He also justified, and whom He justified them He also glorified." It has been

supposed that the steps taken by God in saving sinners were more than those that the Apostle has enumerated, and that others might have been mentioned, if to do so had pleased the inspiring Spirit. For instance, it has been supposed that He could have written: "Whom he effectually called, them He also moved to faith and repentance, and whom He moved to faith and repentance, He also justified." This insertion into the Apostle's language would not, however, have been the enumeration of another step; but only the making explicit an element involved in effectual calling; for effectual calling includes producing a conviction of sin, a supernatural revolution of the fundamental practical dispositions (of the "Will" in the wide sense), a supernatural illumination of the intellect, and an effectual persuasion to faith in Jesus Christ.

It has been maintained also, on a sufficient Scriptural basis, that God sovereignly imputes the legal merits, "the achieved righteousness"—to use the much sneered at, but Biblically warranted, term of the celebrated John Owen—of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the sinner, when, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, he begins to believe on Jesus Christ. The sovereign act of imputation by God is inferred from such passages as Isaiah liii. 5-10; Gal. iii. 13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us." It is taught in such passages as Rom. v. 19: "Through the obedience of one shall many be made" (put into the category of the) "righteous." 2 Cor. v. 21: "He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." This is to say: God made Him putatively a sinner that we might be made putatively righteous, God makes this righteousness (achieved righteousness) of Christ the believer's by imputing it to him. "Even as David describeth the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord imputeth righteousness without works." (Rom. iv. 6.)

From Rom. viii. 29-30, as given by the Apostle, it is clear that the step justification, in God's procedure in saving sinners, comes, in logical order, after His regeneration of him, since regeneration is an element in Effectual Calling—clear, I say, that God justifies the sinner in logical sequence to His regeneration of him.

Having stated the source whence the doctrine of justification must be derived, and the place in which the justifying act is done

by God in His succession of steps in saving a sinner, so far as they are indicated in Rom. viii. 29-30, it is now proper :

FIRST: To set forth the nature of this act of justification as it is indicated in Scripture.

This may be done by consulting lexicographers, and, then, the Scriptures themselves, on the meaning of the word *δικαιῶ*, the word translated *justify*, as used in the Scriptures. The lexicographers tell us that this word, in the Scriptures uniformly, and probably universally, means *not* to make righteous, but *to declare* righteous, or free from exposure to punishment. Some writers claim that two exceptions to this are found in the Old Testament, viz., Is. liii. 11, and Dan. xii. 3, but the declarative, forensic, sense is perfectly tenable in these places also, if we assign only an instrumental agency to the Gospel, or ministry, mentioned; and this is the only sort of agency which can be assigned them. Certain New Testament passages have been pointed out as not having a merely declarative and forensic meaning; i.e., Rom. vi. 7, "For he that is dead is freed from sin," and, 1 Cor. iv. 4, "For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord." In view of the former of these passages, George B. Stevens (*The Theology of the New Testament*, p. 424) says: "The verdict of acquittal is also the effective realisation of an actual deliverance from sin itself." Again he says: "Justification is justification *from sin* as well as acquittal from guilt and condemnation. There is no such thing as a judicial acquittal which is not also an effective deliverance" (Stevens, *ibidem*, p. 425). He thus seems to teach that justification includes sanctification—seems to Romanise; but he mistakes the real meaning of the word "justified" in the passage. Shedd points out that the rendering "*freed from*," is misleading unless it be explained as "*freed from the guilt of*." "Freedom from sin, in the sense of cessation from sin, would require *πένανται*, as in 1 Peter iv. 1. The apostle's meaning is, that he who has died with Christ *for sin*, is thereby justified, and delivered from the curse and condemnation of sin" (Wm. G. T. Shedd, *Commentary on Romans, in loco*).

In 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4, "The apostle in effect says: 'I do not care the least about any critical opinion of yours upon my official work; nay, I do not value my own: even my own self I do not pass under review: for it is true that I am not conscious to myself of any Apostolic delinquency, nevertheless not on that

account am I justified, i.e., declared righteous and pronounced a just steward; to do that belongeth to another; He who now passes me under review with an eye to that final decision is the Lord." Canon Evans, in *Commentary* edited by Canon F. C. Cook.

It may be well to remark that in James ii. 21-24, the term *justify* is used in a sense somewhat different from that in which Paul habitually uses it; but in a distinctly declarative sense nevertheless. James teaches, in verses 21 and 24, that Abraham's work in offering up Isaac manifested—published—the fact of his justification, which took place decades before the offering of Isaac. Meanwhile, he depicts, in verse 23, God's justification of Abraham: "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for (*the obtaining of*) righteousness; and he was called the friend of God."

Fifty years ago an occasional careful writer might say: "The only New Testament passage where the meaning is questionable, is Rev. xxii. 11." But the better attested reading, and the Revised Version, have lifted the meaning of this passage out of the realm of the questionable—this better attested reading being *δικαιοσύνην ποιησάτω*.

It should be noted further that *δικαίωσις* is the declaring a man just, acquitting him from guilt and restoring him to God's favour. Rom. iv. 25, "Who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification"; v. 18, "Even so through one act of righteousness, *the free gift* came unto all men to justification of life."

δικαίωμα names this act of justification viewed as already accomplished. Rom. v. 16, 18: "The free gift came of many trespasses unto justification"; "Even so through one act of righteousness"—one declaration of God—"the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life."

δικαιοσύνη names the state declared by God of one whom He has justified, of one, that is, freed from punishment and restored to the divine favour. Rom. x. 3, "Being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God," a righteousness which God provides and which is appropriated by faith. This righteousness is variously described as *ἡ δικαιοσύνη (ἐκ) θεοῦ ἢ ἐκ (διὰ) πίστεως Χριστοῦ*. Thus in Rom. iii. 22, "The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ." But Paul's

use of one or other of these combinations is so familiar that special passages need not be cited. It is not to be inferred that *δικαιοσύνη* is always used in the technical meaning of justification. The context of Rom. vi. 13, e.g., shows that *δικαιοσύνη* is used in that verse in contrast with *ἀδικία*, wrong-doing, in the preceding clause. The context must make clear, in every case, whether this word is used in its technical, or the popular sense.

This brief study of the Greek word translated *justify*, and of kindred words, must suffice to remind the reader that, according to the better and the best lexicographers, *justification* in Scripture usage, names a declarative, or forensic act done by God, and that that act is sometimes regarded as in the doing, and sometimes as an accomplished act ; and that the word *justify*, never in Scripture names a surgical or remedial work. The question is not what the word might have been used to mean, but what it has been used to mean. That it has been used in the Scriptures in a declarative, or forensic sense may be further shown by considering the following groups of Scripture passages :

1. Certain Scriptures indicate the declarative nature of justification by asserting a justification of objects incapable of being made righteous by a change of character by the justifying, agents referred to in the given cases. Thus, in Ps. li. 4, "That Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest." Matt. xi. 19, "Wisdom is justified of her children." Luke vii. 29, "And the people, when they heard, justified God." Neither wisdom, nor God are subject to moral change by outside forces. They may, however, be declared just.

2. The Scriptures indicate the declarative and forensic nature of justification by speaking of it as contrasted with condemnation. The opposite of "to sanctify" is "*to pollute.*" But the opposite of "to justify" is "to condemn." Thus we read, Deut. xxv. 1, "They shall justify the righteous and condemn the wicked"; Rom. iii. 20, "By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for through the law cometh the knowledge of sin." Rom. viii. 33, "It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?"

3. In the Scriptures the act of a magistrate in justifying the wicked is pronounced abominably wicked. Prov. xvii. 15, "For he that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the righteous, both are abomination to the Lord." Isa. v. 23; "Woe to them that justify the wicked for a bribe, and take

away the righteousness of the righteous from him." But if to justify the wicked were to make him righteous in character it would be a most praiseworthy work on the part of the magistrate.

A small objection has been brought against this argument, on the ground that if it is iniquitous in the human magistrate to pronounce a sinner righteous, it must be wrong for God to justify the sinner in this sense. The answer of course is, that while God is able "to impute to the ungodly whom He is about to justify, a vicarious satisfaction for his guilt, and to precede and to accompany this justification with sanctifying grace, ensuring his future obedience, the human magistratē can do nothing of the kind."

4. The Scriptural representations as to the adjuncts of justification indicate that it is forensic in character.

Thus those who are the object of the act have been liable to punishment, *ὑπόδικοι*, Rom. iii. 19, 20, "We know that what things soever the law saith, it speaketh to them that are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God; because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for through the law cometh the knowledge of sin." Job. ix. 2, 3, "How can a man be just with God? If He be pleased to contend with him, he cannot answer Him one of a thousand." Ps. cxliii. 2, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight no man living is righteous."

There is a bar at which the act is performed, according to Scripture. Luke xvi. 15, "Ye are they which justify yourselves in the sight of men; but God knoweth your heart." Isa. xliii. 26, "Let us plead together: set thou forth thy cause that thou mayest be justified."

There is an advocate pleading the cause of the believer. 1 John ii. 1, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Justification is a forensic act.

5. Again, equivalent expressions all point to a forensic act. Thus, in Rom. iv. 4-6, justification is explained by the forgiveness of iniquity, and covering of sin. In Rom. v. 9, we are said to be justified by His blood and saved from wrath through Him; and in v. 10, "Justification" is further explained by "reconciliation"—by the fact that God's compassion for the souls of men, co-existing with his wrath at man's sins, prompted Him to take the place of

man under condemnation, and to propitiate Himself notwithstanding his wrath at man's sins. In John iii. 18; v. 24, "He that heareth My words and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath eternal life and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed from death unto life." It is a case of "not coming into judgment (condemnation)," but passing from "death unto life."

6. Last of all, "the only sense of the word which makes Paul's argument in Romans, chapters two to five, intelligible, is the forensic sense; for the whole question there discussed is concerning the way of acquittal of a sinner before God." So says Dr. R. L. Dabney, and so a multitude of the best commentators.

Justification according to the Scriptures is then, a declarative—a forensic act, proceeding, as we shall presently see, upon the sovereign imputation of Christ's achieved righteousness, and declaring the law perfectly satisfied concerning us. It involves acquittal from condemnation, and restoration to divine favour. The justifying act itself is strictly legal though grounded on the righteousness of Christ, sovereignly imputed to the sinner who has believed in Jesus Christ.

SECOND: Having seen that justification is an act—a forensic act, the question arises, Is this Act simple or complex? The answer must be that it is complex, that in it God does two distinct things about the believing sinner in justifying him: (1) remits the punishment due to him for his sins; and (2) restores him to sonship. Of these in their order:

(1) Remission of punishment: In the act of justification God acquits the sinner, who believes in Jesus Christ, of the necessity of undergoing the penalties to which he has been liable. He does not declare that this sinner is morally holy or innocent of the sins which have been laid to his charge. These affirmations would not be true. He declares that the requirements which the law has made of this sinner, have been met and that he is free from liability to suffer penalty for his sins—that he is no longer under condemnation. John iii. 16, "God . . . gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish." Rom. v. 1, "Being therefore justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Forgiveness, in the Biblical representation, is *remission of penalty*; the non-infliction of judicial suffering upon the guilty. The key to the idea is given in Leviticus vi. 2-7, "If a soul commit a trespass, he shall bring

his trespass offering, and the priest shall make an atonement for him before Jehovah, and he shall be forgiven.' The punishment due to his sin shall be dismissed, or let go, because it has been endured for him by a substitute victim." Shedd.: *Com. on Romans in loco*.

Theologians sometimes attempt to distinguish between pardon and forgiveness making pardon, The act of God viewed as a judge, and forgiveness, The act of God viewed as a father. The distinction appears to us insufficiently established.¹

But forgiveness, pardon, is an appealing act to the believing sinner. Micah vii. 18, "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth the iniquity and passeth over the transgression of the remnant of Thine heritage?" Ps. cxxx. 4, "There is a forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared." The divine forgiveness would appear more precious to sinning believers than it does, were we able to keep in mind how abominable a thing sin is in God's eyes, and what it costs God to forgive it. He cannot regard it lightly. He can never lose sight of its loathsomeness and wrongness. He knows that it deserves punishment. He is full of holy wrath against it. Yet, amazing fact, He is the Lord God that forgiveth iniquity, and transgression, and sin.

Yes; while there is no place for remission of just penalties from clearly proven transgressions by earthly judges, in the procedure in God's court there is remission of punishment for believers although they are confessedly offenders; and in the act of justification God pronounces the remission. Ps. xxxiv. 22, "Jehovah redeemeth the soul of His servants, and none of them that take refuge in Him shall be condemned." God of all grace! He hath provided for this procedure by the incarnation, life and death of His well-beloved Son. Acts xiii. 38, 39, "Be it known unto you, therefore, brethren, that through this man is proclaimed unto you remission of sins; and by Him every one of you that believeth is justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."

In the effort to grasp the preciousness of this forgiveness, we should keep to the fore that God's forgiving, or pardoning, the believing sinner is not the act of an earthlike ruler, who from mere "benevolence" to a sinner, or from expediency, says,

¹ Three Hebrew words, כָּפַר, סָלַח, and שָׁחַט, are translated "pardon," sometimes, and sometimes, "forgive," in the Old Testament; while in the New Testament, ἀφίημι, χαρίζομαι and ἀπολυειν are translated "to forgive," and "pardon" does not seem to occur.

“ I will let it pass,” “ I will lift from him the penalty of his sin,” but it is the act of one who says, “ I will do the right as the ruler of the whole world, I will do the right because I must, from my very nature ; and yet I will remit this sinner’s deserved penalty, after the provision for him of an adequate substitute to take his law place, that substitute Myself in the person of the Son.”

But forgiveness, pardon, acquittal of obligation to suffer penalty is not the whole of justification.

(2) Restoration to the divine favour is the other element in this single but complex act. The Arminian asserts, it is true, that simple forgiveness is the whole of the act of justification ; and cites in support of the assertion Rom. iv. 4-8, and kindred passages. If it could be shown that Paul meant in these passages to define justification in its entirety, these brethren could claim that he teaches, *in them*, that justification is merely forgiveness, though at the cost of inconsistency with Scripture teaching elsewhere. It was not, however, his purpose in these passages to exhibit justification in its entirety, but to fix the attention of the guilty sinner, convicted of his sin and under dread of penalty, on that element of justification which answered to the need of which he was most acutely conscious—an acquittal from obligation to suffer penalty. There are other Scriptures in which the act is described as containing more than forgiveness, as containing forgiveness plus acceptance by God as righteous. Some such passages containing the word justify, or justification, and in which the doctrine of justification by faith is set forth are : Rom. v. 1, 2, “ Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ; through whom also we have had our access by faith into this grace wherein we now stand and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” “ *This grace* ” is a permanent state of God’s favour. Tit. iii. 7, “ That being justified by His grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Heirship is something given in justification. In John i. 12—“ But as many as received Him, to them gave He right to become the children of God, even to them that believe on His name ”—we are taught that “ the becoming children,” is a part of justification. Gal. iii. 26, “ For ye are all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ.”

These texts show that justification is more than remission or acquittal. That would leave the believing sinner in the position of a discharged criminal—but out in the cold. Justification

declares the believer in a relation of peace with God, rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God, an heir (by justification) according to the hope of eternal life. As A. H. Strong puts it, "Besides deliverance from punishment and acceptance as righteous, justification implies God's treatment of the sinner as if he were righteous and had been personally righteous. The justified person receives not only remission of penalty, but the rewards promised to obedience." (*Systematic Theology*, p. 856).

This restoration to favour considered in its aspect of the soul's true relation to God is called adoption. Gal. iv. 4, 5, "God sent forth His son born of a woman, born under the law, that He might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Ephesians i. 5, "Having fore-ordained us unto the adoption of sons." John i. 12, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name." John iii. 16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him should have . . . eternal life." When the sinner believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, he is justified. In being justified he is adopted into the family of God.

More broadly, the Scriptures teach that the law contains a twofold sanction, life for perfect obedience to it, a penal death for any infraction of it. Remission would release from any penalty for the law's breach; but would not bring the reward offered to the obedient. He who broke the law and has suffered the penalty, does not stand on the same platform with him who has never broken the law. The believing and repentant law breaker needs more than mere forgiveness. He needs restoration to the divine favour.

It must not be thought, however, that in justifying the believing sinner, God therein makes him righteous in character. Dr. George Baker Stevens, in his *Theology of the New Testament*, p. 425, says, as already pointed out, "Justification is justification from sin as well as acquittal from guilt and condemnation. There is no such thing as judicial acquittal which is not also an effective moral deliverance."

Dr. Stevens runs into a mistake here. Justification presupposes regeneration, and faith consequent on regeneration, as logically precedent to this act of quittance of penalty, and of restoration to God's favour; and justification, once the sinner

becomes conscious of it as done about him, pleads with him to lead a holy life.

So far we have seen the place of justification in the order of the steps which God takes in saving the sinner ; have seen that, as respects the nature of the divine act of justification, it is a declarative, a forensic act ; have seen that, in the justifying act, God both acquits the believing sinner of obligation to suffer the penalty due to him for his sin, and restores him to sonship.

The question now comes :

THIRD : What is the ground on which God acquits the believing sinner and counts him righteous ?

Is it man's own righteousness, quickened and strengthened, by the example of " Jesus of Nazareth," or by other great and worthy historical examples, as in effect say, Unitarians, Schleiermachians, and rationalistic thinkers of the extremer sort, generally. If so, then it is a most unstable ground—the filthy ground of man's righteousness.

Is it the inherent grace wrought in the sinner by the Holy Spirit for Christ's sake ? If so, it is an inadequate ground. All Christian men, even the best, are imperfect.

Is it the sinner's faith and repentance, and evangelical obedience, flowing therefrom, as the Lower Arminian says ? If so, it is an inadequate ground. It is vastly imperfect.

Is it " The obedience of faith "—the work of receiving and resting on Christ for salvation, as the Higher Arminians say ? That work of receiving and resting on Christ for salvation is done by imperfect man, is imperfect therefore ; and if perfectly done would seem an imperfect ground, being a single act, on which to count the sinner righteous. No wonder these people believe in falling from grace ; for this receiving and resting on Christ is variable, and sometimes appears not to consciousness according to these brethren themselves.

All these schools which make the work, or work and character of a man, the ground, or ground in part, of justification build on the sand and are overthrown by the Apostles : " Therefore, by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight : For by the law is the knowledge of sin." " But if it is by grace, it is no more works : Otherwise grace is no more grace."

Ritschl says, " The ground of justification, or forgiveness of sins, is the benevolent, gracious, merciful purpose of God to

vouchsafe to sinful man the privilege of access to himself." (*Justification and Faith*, English Translation, by Messrs. Mackintosh and Macaulay, p. 108.) But he refers to the first cause and not to the meritorious ground. Dr. James Denney says: "God justifies the ungodly man on the basis of his faith in Jesus, and there is nothing unreal about the justification. He proclaims and treats him as one who is right with Himself. And he is right with Himself. As long as he maintains the attitude of faith he remains right, nor is there any other attitude in which he can ever be right." (*The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, p. 164). But he has slidden back to the Higher Arminian ground, which is an inadequate ground, and he has to run counter to Paul's doctrine. Dr. H. R. Mackintosh seems also to have reverted to the same Higher Arminian view. They make God pronounce the believer righteous when he knows that his righteousness is a filthy rag. They say that there is no fiction in justification, and in this affirmation they are correct; but, in their doctrine of the ground, they represent God as dealing with a man's imperfect faith as if it were perfect righteousness, which is to teach that He misrepresents—a deplorable fiction on His part, if they are correct.

As was affirmed in the opening sentences of this article, we are dependent on special supernatural revelation—on revelation recorded in the Scriptures—for the knowledge of the fact that justification may be had by the sinner. We are also dependent on the Scriptures for any true knowledge as to the ground on which God pronounces the sinner just. According to the Bible, the ground of the restoration of the sinner to God's favour is not found in the sinner's personal character, or conduct, but altogether in the obedience and suffering of Christ in the sinner's stead—in Christ's righteousness—Christ's "achieved righteousness," the sinner being united to Him by faith. Thus the merit of Christ's obedience and death is the ground of the believing sinner's justification. The sinner is acquitted of the penalty due to his sin, because Christ has suffered the penalty denounced in the law; and the believer is granted the rewards promised to obedience because Christ has obeyed in his stead. The great Apostle had a sense of the worth of Christ's obedience and death, and of the achieved righteousness to be found in Christ. "Not," he says, "having a righteousness of mine own, *even* that which is of the law, but that which is through the faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Phil. iii. 9). 2 Cor.

v. 21, "Him who knew no sin, God made to be sin on our behalf, that we might be made the righteousness of God." That is, Christ, who was sinless, God treated as sinful, put the guilt of men on Him, that He might treat us as righteous, having a righteousness not our own, not of the works of the law, but yet a righteousness of which God is author and giver. 1 Cor. i. 30, "Who" (Christ) "of God is made unto us . . . righteousness." Rom. iv. 6, "Even as David also pronounceth blessing upon the man unto whom God reckoneth righteousness apart from works." Rom. v. 18, "By the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification." Rom. v. 19, "By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."

Justification presupposes a righteousness which is the ground of the acquittal and favour—the righteousness of Christ—His "achieved righteousness," the merit of His life of obedience and penal death—the righteousness, which is of God. The ends of the law are satisfied by what Christ has done and suffered. Hence the sinner is acquitted of the obligation to penalty. The law is not set aside. Its ends are assured by what Christ has done on our behalf. And in acquitting us in the justifying act, God does it in consistency with His holiness, which He ever maintains. He magnifies His holy law in His wondrous work of grace.

But the question comes up : Can God impute to us, reckon as belonging to us, the righteousness of Christ ?

Let it be kept in mind that the righteousness of Christ said to be imputed is, not at all His inherent and essential quality of righteousness, but the merit of His obedience to the preceptive law of God, and of suffering unto death to make satisfaction for man's breach of the law. This has been called his "achieved righteousness." Two kinds of righteousness might have been the possession of the first Adam. He was inherently righteous by creation. God made Him a righteous being. He was given an opportunity to win another sort of righteousness. Had he complied with the conditions prescribed in the covenant of works, he would have been elevated to an estate of assured and everlasting blessedness. He would at the end of the period of probation have come into possession, as a gift of God, of the second kind of righteousness, an achieved righteousness. God would have justified him. So the second Adam, though inherently righteous did win, by putting Himself into man's place, and serving voluntarily as his substitute, a second sort of righteousness—an

achieved righteousness—a title to reward, in virtue of the Covenant of Redemption between the persons of the Godhead. It is this second sort of His righteousness, this title to reward, this merit of the incarnate Son which God sovereignly imputes to the sinner as the basis of His act of justification. It is quite one thing to reckon, as belonging to another, the essential quality of Christ, and another thing to reckon that other righteousness, the title to reward. It is this latter kind of righteousness only that can be imputed. King David had no trouble in transferring the reward due to the loyal, but aged, Barzillai to his son, or friend, Chimham, though he was not at all able to transfer the traits of character of Barzillai to Chimham. Paul could not have asked Philemon to transfer the traits of character of Onesimus to him (Paul). But he was bold to ask that he himself be charged with the debt of Onesimus, consequent on his running away from Philemon. According to the Scriptures, the believing sinner's liability to suffering for his sins is charged to Christ, and the achieved righteousness which Christ won by his obedience and suffering, while substituting for those to be saved, is imputed to them upon believing, and upon the basis of this imputed righteousness they are justified.

Some arguments supporting the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us, are :

1st. The counterpart imputation of our guilt to Him which is proved by Isa. liii. 5, 6, 12, " But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him ; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray ; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all . . . because He poured out his soul unto death : and He was numbered with the transgressors: Yet He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." Heb. ix. 28, " So, Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many." 1 Peter ii. 24, " Who His own self bore our sins in His body upon the tree." The principles involved in the imputation of our guilt to Christ are so clearly the same ; and that transaction is so clearly causative of the imputation of his righteousness to believing sinners, that one who admits a proper imputation of man's guilt to Christ should not deny the imputation of His righteousness to the believer. Both imputations are conclusively stated in 2 Cor. v. 21, " Him who knew no sin, He made to be sin on our

behalf ; that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." It is clear " that Paul here used the abstract for the concrete. Christ was made a sinner (putatively) for us, that we might be made righteous persons (putatively) in him. The senses of the two members of the parallelism must correspond. There is no other tenable sense than this obvious one—that our guilt (obligation to penalty) was imputed to Christ, that His righteousness (title to reward) might be imputed to us." (R. L. Dabney : *Systematic Theology*, pp. 642-3.)

2nd. Christ is called our righteousness. Jer. xxiii. 6 ; 1 Cor. i. 30. These expressions can be honestly received only by admitting the idea of imputation. (Dabney *ut supra*.)

3rd. By his obedience many shall be put into the category of the " righteous " (*κατασταθήσονται*). Here we have imputation affirmed. Rom. x. 4. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness, the end in the sense of fulfilment : Christ vicariously meets all the requirements of the law, both as penalty and precept. He is righteousness, conformity to law, to every one that believeth. All the passages cited to prove that we are justified on the ground of Christ's righteousness involve the idea of imputation. How else can his righteousness become ours ?

4th. The imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers is argued by Paul, in the fifth chapter of Romans, from the analogy of the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity. (See Dabney's *Theology ut supra*.)

All who are justified by God are justified on the ground of Christ's righteousness imputed to them.

In the passages cited in the foregoing pages, as sources of the doctrine of justification in the various aspects considered, the word faith has occurred with great frequency. They teach that we are justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently another question has emerged :

FOURTH : What is the relation of faith to justification ?

We cannot, we have seen, with the Lower Arminian regard justifying faith, as " the seminal principle of good works and inclusive of all the obedience which is to flow from it," and maintain that we are justified because of it, on it as ground. For this would bring us into conflict with the Scripture teaching, that we are justified, if at all, on the ground of the righteousness of Christ, imputed to us and received by faith, and with the plain Scripture teachings that a sinful man cannot be justified by works,

or by works in part. We cannot, with the Wesleyans, regard justifying faith (which they correctly teach is receiving and resting on Christ for justification), as a work, and maintain with them that God justifies the believer because of faith, on the ground of his faith; for this would be to teach that justification is on the ground of our working; whereas justification is not on the ground of human working but on the ground of the achieved righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith.

Faith, which receives and rests on Christ for salvation as He is offered in the gospel is a condition (subjective to the sinner) of his justification. H. B. Smith (*Systematic Theology*, p. 524) says: "An internal change is a *sine qua non* of justification, but not its meritorious ground." Faith is the instrumental condition, *sine qua non* of justification, because through it we take Christ—Christ with His achieved righteousness—the merit of His obedience and the merit of His penal death—as our substitute. Our faith is not a thing of merit. It is faulty like all that we do and are; but it is the instrumental bond of our union to Christ who saves everyone that cometh unto Him. The Scriptures never say that we are justified *διὰ πίστιν*, on account of faith, but only *διὰ πίστεως*, through faith, or *ἐκ πίστεως*, by faith. According to the Scriptural teaching the efficient cause of justification is the grace of God, the meritorious cause of justification is the obedience and penal sufferings of Christ, and the instrumental cause of justification is faith, by which we are united to Christ.

Faith was appointed by God as a condition *sine qua non* of justification. 1st. Not because it is virtuous—a good work—but, because it is receptive. Like a beggar it holds out an empty hand, it receives grace, does not give it, but receives it. It is the only sort of instrument possible in a system of justification by grace. Justification is an act of God's free grace. The act is wholly God's. The justified cannot boast with reference to it. 2nd. All the benefits we receive in Christ we receive in virtue of our union with Him—the union which He has efficiently wrought by His Spirit, and, which we instrumentally accept by faith. Faith being the instrumental condition of our union with Christ is the instrument of our justification. 3rd. The Scriptures abound in the teaching, as already seen, that justification is *by* faith. 4th. There are Scriptures in which faith is held up as the sole condition of justification, in answer to the direct inquiry as

to how one may escape the wrath of God : For example, Acts xvi. 30-31, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved ? And they said : Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." This faith rests *on*, or *in*, Christ, in His blood, in His sacrifice, in His whole life and death and character, and in the promises of God in Him to the sinner. It denies its own justifying value, and affirms the sole merit of that in which it rests. "Saving faith has an approvable character ?" Very good ; it is yet true as Paul wrote, Gal. ii. 16, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we believed on Christ Jesus that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law ; because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." Gal. iii. 26, "We are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."

Some have supposed that repentance is, in many places of Scripture, spoken of as a condition of justification. They point to such passages as Acts ii. 38, "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins" ; and iii. 19. But while these texts teach that repentance is an instrument of salvation, they do not teach that it is the instrumental condition of that step in salvation which is called justification. These texts must be reconciled with the abundant plain teaching elsewhere in Scripture which makes faith the sole instrumental, or occasional, condition in the sinner of God's performing the act of justification. The reconciliation is easy if we remember that the word repentance is used in Scripture to include much more than justifying faith. In repentance faith is involved as an element. Repentance includes faith. In calling for repentance, therefore, the apostle calls for the faith included in it ; and when a comprehensive answer was desired to the question : what must we do to be saved, in the thorough-going sense of the word "saved," "Repent," might well have been the most appropriate answer, especially in an address to those who had persecuted Christ recently unto death. But when the questioner is concerned about escape from the penalty due him for his sin and asks what he must do to be saved, "Believe" is the appropriate and sufficient answer. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

The question which comes next for discussion is :

FIFTH: What is the source of this faith which conditions justification ?

This question may be dealt with very briefly. As a human experience it is a complex exercise involving an intellectual, an appetitive, and a volitional element; but the natural man, being dead in trespasses and in sins, is incompetent to expressing himself in this threefold way. Of course he possesses the intellectual, the appetitive and volitional faculties; but as long as he is irregenerate, his appetencies do not reach out Godward. As long as he is irregenerate he will not see as desirable giving up trust in himself and putting into its place trust in God. As long as he remains irregenerate he will not *will* to trust himself to Christ. Man would never have justifying faith as long as left unregenerate. Hence the evident propriety of the place of justification in the steps of God in saving man. As seen, at the outset, justification comes after effectual calling, i.e. after regeneration, and after faith the capacity for which is wrought in regeneration. Hence the evident force of Eph. ii. 7, 8, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." God is the author of faith in the human heart.

Regeneration, a change wrought by the Holy Spirit in a sinner's character, a quickening of him from spiritual death to spiritual life, a change of his nature such that, whereas heretofore he has been prevalently ungodly, he, in consequence of the change begins to live a life of prevalent godliness, is a necessary *causal prius* to faith, which is a *sine qua non* to justification by faith. When God forensically justifies the believing sinner, His act of justification presupposes that He has regenerated that sinner—has begun the sanctification of him—begun to develop in that sinner a holiness inherent which will some day become perfect. There is much talking and writing against forensic justification of sinners by the Most High as though, if forensic justification be a fact, God must trample upon plain principles of ethics. Nothing is further from the truth. If the doctrine of imputation be true, and if the doctrine of the voluntary self substitution of Christ in the sinner's law place be true, and if consequently God sovereignly imputes the merit of Christ's obedience and death in the sinner's stead to the sinner, then forensic justification is not only not unrighteous but righteous and wonderfully gracious. And it is much more creditable to the Most High to suppose that he counts this righteousness of Christ for what it is, perfect, than to suppose, with some of the ethicists, that He counts the

sinner's faith and obedience as perfect righteousness which it is not. Besides God has planned to make the forensically justified, ultimately ethically just, and has been at work in creating, and beginning the development of, such a character in him before he has forensically justified him albeit the sanctifying work is far from completion.

SIXTH: May faith be the only grace in a person on the point of justification, or when justified ?

The Scriptures teach that faith alone is the instrument of justification ; but they do not teach that faith is ever alone in the man who has been justified, or is on the point of receiving justification. They teach that the fruit of the Spirit is " love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." These are severally Christian graces and coexist evidently, or potentially, along with faith ; and these are not all of the Christian graces, found along with faith. Repentance is a twin grace with faith. Repentance unto life and justifying faith are the converting acts logically consequent on regeneration. The capacity for each is given man in regeneration ; and when one comes the other comes. They are as closely united as were the Siamese twins ; and should one die the other grace would also die. Saving faith is also (on one side) an active principle and it prompts to good works, and yet no good works ground or condition, even instrumentally, the justification of a sinner in the sight of God ; and no other gracious exercise of man seems to have been appointed as occasional or instrumental causes of justification. But God has been pleased to appoint and to reveal His appointment of faith (because of its receptivity) as a condition of His forensically declaring him who has it justified on the ground of Christ's righteousness imputed to him.

SEVENTH: Can this justification be regarded as gracious ?

It has been supposed by some that if by His obedience and death Christ rendered full payment to God of the debt the sinner owed—i.e., if Christ made full satisfaction to the Father's justice, then justification cannot be by grace but is something which God owes.

Nevertheless, as regards those justified, justification is a manifestation of amazing grace. The fact that the righteousness of Christ is the ground of justification, and that His obedience and death satisfy the divine justice to the uttermost, so far from being inconsistent with the free grace of justification, magnifies

the grace of it. God yearned for the salvation of a multitude that no man can number. He could save them only by the sacrifice of righteous law—righteous principle—or by the sacrifice of an adequate substitute for them before the bar of His justice. There was no adequate substitute to be found for man in the whole creature realm. Every rational creature owed his utmost obedience on his own account. To find a substitute God had first to produce him. To do this, He invades the Godhead to find a person who was lord of his own life—a person under no obligation to render a life of perfect human obedience, nor to die a penal death on His own account. He had, further, to fit this person by incarnating him so that He should become able to render a perfect human obedience and to die a human penal death, in the sinner's stead. God's regard for absolute justice and His saving mercy find their highest expression in the substitutionary life of the incarnate Son and his vicarious death on the cross. A. A. Hodge well says : "The self assumption of the penalty upon the part of the eternal Son of God was the highest conceivable vindication of the inviolability of justice, and at the same time the highest conceivable expression of infinite love. Justice is vindicated in the vicarious suffering of the very penalty in strict rigour. Free grace is manifested : (1) in the admittance of a vicarious sufferer. (2) in the gift of God's beloved Son for that service. (3) in the sovereign election of the persons to be represented by him. (4) in the glorious rewards which accrue to them on condition of that representation."

EIGHTH: When does this infinitely gracious act take place ?

Some Arminians and some Antinomians have argued, that, if Christ really paid the debt of His elect by His obedience and sufferings endured while He was on the earth, they must have been justified from the moment the debt was paid. But neither Christian experience nor Scripture supports this conclusion. They unite in teaching that justification is done on occasion of the sinner's receiving Christ by faith.

Christ did indeed pay the debt of His people while He was here on earth, but His payment was not in legal tender, and not conditioned as the payment of a pecuniary debt. If my friend offers to pay my financial indebtedness in good legal tender, the creditor must accept at once, or forfeit the right to collect forever after. Christ paid the full equivalent of our moral obligation—obeyed perfectly the preceptive law of God in our place, and paid

in full the penalty for the breach of the law—for the indignity done to God in breaking His righteous law; but as it was a matter of grace on God's part to permit a substitute for the sinner, so it was a matter of free agreement between the Father, representing the Godhead, and Christ, representing the elect, as to just when the penalty should be lifted from off the sinner. It seemed good to the parties, evidently, that the penalty should be lifted when the elect sinner should believe. Gal. ii. 16, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we believed on Christ Jesus that we might be justified by faith in Christ." See Scriptures *passim*.

We have seen that immediately on a sinner's believing on Jesus Christ, God declares his justification.

NINTH : Last, is the sinner's justification at once complete ; and does he remain in this justified relation for all time ?

God's justification of the sinner is as complete as its meritorious ground. That meritorious ground—"the righteousness of Christ" is absolutely without limit. So must be the justification of the sinner. If the rationalistic view that the sinner is justified on the ground of his own character, or if the Lower Arminian view, that the sinner is justified on the ground of his faith and evangelical obedience flowing therefrom, or if the Wesleyan view, that the sinner is justified on the basis of his faith—receiving and resting on Jesus Christ—or, if anyone of the modern views that justification is grounded on some subjective attitude, or other, of the believing sinner be true, then there can be no complete justification and no certainly durable relation of justification for any sinner. Because, as all must admit, the character of the person justified is after all imperfect. The Lower Arminian must admit that both the faith of the believer, and his obedience proceeding therefrom, are imperfect. Our excellent Wesleyan brother admits that faith, viewed as a work of the believer—which must be viewed in that way if made the ground of justification—is imperfect ; and the act must correspond to the ground. But if we hold to the truth that they who are justified, are justified on the ground of Christ's righteousness, we can hold, notwithstanding varying degrees of faith and varying degrees of excellence of character, that, if they have genuine faith, their justification is absolute. For faith merely conditions justification *sine qua non*, not causatively. The procuring cause of justification is the meritorious righteousness

of Christ. It is not in faith. If we be linked to Christ by genuine faith, we receive, whether our faith be weak or strong, whether we be more or less perfectly holy, absolute justification. Dabney illustrates the matter happily: "Suppose in men's bodies a mortal disease of which the perfect cure was a shock of electricity, received from some exhaustless 'receiver' by contact. One man discovering his mortal taint, but yet a little enfeebled, rushes to the electrical receiver and clasps his hands swiftly upon it with all the force of a violent blow. He receives his shock and is saved. Another, almost fainting, can only creep along the floor with the greatest difficulty, and has barely strength to raise his languid hand and lay it on the 'receiver.' He also derives the same shock and the same healing. The power is in the electricity, not in the impact of the two hands. Hence, also, it will follow that justification is an instantaneous act, making at once a complete change of legal condition." See pp. 643-648. John v. 24, "He that heareth My word and believeth on Him that sent Me hath eternal life and cometh not into judgment but hath passed from death unto life." Rom. viii. 1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus," *et passim*.

However, our awareness of being in the relation of justification may grow or diminish and grow again. As our faith strengthens, and as our sense of peace with God grows we may expect to have a growing apprehension of our justification. But that subjective conviction of ours does not change our relation of justification to God—does not alter the ground of our justification, or improve the character of our title to God's favour. That is determined by the imputed achieved righteousness of Christ. On "Christ the solid Rock I stand, All other ground is sinking sand."

However the fruits of justification may multiply as we advance in the Christian life, the enjoyments of this advance does not strengthen our title to life. As God sees things that title is ours, if we have any real genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—if we have even a nascent vital connection with Him.

Moreover, once a man really believes and is really forensically justified, God keeps the principle of his faith alive—keeps it from utter extinction and thus prevents the believer from falling into condemnation.

Is He keeping faith alive in you, notwithstanding your weakness and wickedness? If not, you cannot be one who does

believe or has ever truly believed. "Whom He called, them He also justified ; and whom He justified them He glorified."

In the last great day the Judge of all the earth will cause every eye to see that whom He justifies, He justified without neglecting previously to work in him also a change of ethical character which was to be edified and edified till it should come to have neither spot nor wrinkle nor any such thing. Amen.

THOS. CARY JOHNSON.

Richmond, Va., U.S.A.