

Justification

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To be justified is to be cleared from every charge that could be brought against us. That this is the meaning is very apparent in the Apostle's words, recorded in Acts 13: 39, "By Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." The law could most effectually impeach us. It could lay sins to our charge and bring a righteous condemnation upon us. Only by Christ can the believer be righteously cleared from every charge in the impeachment, so that the sentence of condemnation is lifted off him.

Condemnation then is the state and position from which we pass when we are justified. It is evidently the opposite to justification, just as guilt is the opposite to forgiveness. Yet justification, as set before us in Scripture, implies more than the negative blessing of our being completely and righteously extricated from the condemnation under which we lay: it involves our standing before God in Christ, in a righteousness which is positive and divine.

We must again turn to the Epistle to the Romans. In Romans 3: 19 we find that, "all the world" stands convicted as "guilty before God." In verse 20 we find that the law can only convict: there is no justification for us in it. In verse 21, begins the unfolding of God's way of justifying the ungodly.

Inasmuch as "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," it is not surprising that God should bring into manifestation His righteousness. Man having manifested his sin in all its blackness it was to be expected that, by way of contrast, God would manifest His righteousness in all its brightness; condemning the sinner, and thus clearing Himself of the smallest suspicion that He in any way condoned the sin. What is so wonderful is that now God's righteousness has been manifested in such a way as to be "**unto**" or "**towards** all, and upon all them that believe." Righteousness, God's righteousness, is, as it were, stretching out its hands benignly towards all men instead of frowning upon them; and as for those that believe, it descends upon them as a robe, so that in the presence of God they stand invested in it. And all this is done without righteousness in any way losing its own proper character, or ceasing to be what it is.

Upon first hearing this, our impulse might be to exclaim, "Impossible! Such a thing as this is absolutely impossible!" We might be disposed to reason that, while mercy might act in this fashion, but at the expense of righteousness, righteousness itself could never do so.

Yet righteousness does so act, since it has now been manifested in Christ, who has been set forth by God as a "propitiation," or "mercy-seat," (verse 25). When upon the cross His blood was shed, there was fulfilled the Antitype of the blood-sprinkled mercy-seat of Tabernacle days. Redemption was

wrought "in Christ Jesus," (verse 24), and the greatest display of divine righteousness, which the universe will ever witness, took place. By and by the righteousness of God will be manifested in the judgment and everlasting overthrow of the ungodly. That solemn hour will witness no mean display of divine righteousness, yet not so profound and wonderful as in that yet more solemn hour when God judged and put to grief His own spotless Son for us. The cross of Christ will remain to all eternity the greatest manifestation of the righteousness of God. It manifested equally His love of course, as Romans 5: 8 declares, but had it not manifested His righteousness it could not have manifested His love.

The death of Christ has displayed the righteousness of God in a twofold way. First, as regards His dealings as to the sins of believers in the past dispensation (verse 25); and second, as to the sins of believers in this present age (verse 26). Before Christ came God passed over the sins of His people, though as yet no perfect satisfaction for them had been made to Him. In this present time He is justifying the believer in Jesus. Have all these dealings on God's part been conducted in strict righteousness? They have, and the death of Christ declares it; showing that when God passed over sins during the bygone dispensation He was absolutely justified in doing so, as also He is just in justifying the believer to-day.

The death of Christ was primarily the offering of Himself **to God** as a sacrifice of infinite value and fragrance. Propitiation was thereby effected, and satisfaction made, so that the claims of divine righteousness have been met and vindicated in regard to the whole matter of man's sin.

Secondarily, however, His offering was **for us**, i.e. for all true believers. Such are entitled to view the Saviour as their Substitute, and to translate Romans 4: 25 out of the plural into the singular, and say, He "was delivered for my offences, and was raised again for my justification." He was delivered to death and judgment with our sins in view: He was raised again from the dead with our justification in view.

Many there are who in this matter cut the Gospel in half, and ignore the second part of it to their own great loss. Full assurance cannot be enjoyed if the meaning of Christ's resurrection be overlooked. The bearing of our sins and their penalty was indeed accomplished in His death, but the declaration and proof of our clearance is in His resurrection. Without this second part settled peace cannot be known.

To illustrate the point, let us suppose a man condemned to six months' imprisonment for an offence, and another as a substitute permitted to take his place. When the prison gates swing to, shutting the substitute within and leaving the offender in liberty without, the latter might well exclaim of his friend, "He has been delivered to prison for my offence," but further than that he cannot go for the moment. It would be premature for him to add, "and consequently it is impossible that I should ever see the inside of that prison, as the penalty for what I have done."

What if his good friend breathed his last at the end of two months, leaving four months of the sentence unexpired? The Authorities would righteously lay their hands on the original offender and demand that he himself should work out the remainder of his term.

But, on the other hand, if a week or so before the six months were up he should suddenly come upon his kindly substitute walking in the street, and on expressing his surprise, learn that, having by good behaviour earned a small remission of the sentence, he was really discharged as a free man, he would instantly be able to say, "Why, you are released from prison for my justification!" He would argue in his own mind, **and rightly**, "If he is discharged from prison as free from all further liability, completely cleared in regard to my offence, then **I am discharged, I am free, I am cleared!**"

Viewed in this light, the resurrection of Christ is seen to be the Divine declaration of the complete

clearance of the one who believes in Him. It is, we need hardly say, much else besides.

Having said this much, we must now observe that God Himself is not only the Source of our justification but He who justifies us. "It is God that justifieth" (Rom. 8: 33). From His lips came the sentence against us as sinners. Equally from His lips comes forth the declaration of our clearance as believers in Jesus. Our justification therefore is complete and authoritative. No one can condemn us.

But on our side faith is necessary; for only believers are justified. In this sense we are, "justified by faith" (Rom. 5: 1). Only as yielding "the obedience of faith" to our Lord Jesus do we come in under the benefits of His work. He is "the Author of eternal salvation" only to "all them that obey Him" (Heb. 5: 9). Faith is the link which connects us with Him and the justifying merits of His blood.

One further thought as to justification is presented to us in Romans 5: 18. In nearly every other passage where justification is mentioned it stands in relation to our sins — "of many offences unto justification," as Romans 5: 16 puts it. In verse 18, however, another view of the matter appears, and sin, the root, rather than sins, the fruit, is in question. The one righteousness of the cross has its bearing "towards" all "unto justification of life" (New Trans.).

To understand this phrase, the whole passage — verse 12 to the end of the chapter — must be considered. By nature all men stand related to Adam, as the head and fountain of their race. By grace, and through Christ's death and resurrection, all believers stand related to Him, as the Head and Fountain of that spiritual race to which they now belong. As grafted into Christ, if we may so speak, they participate in His life and nature; and as in the life of Christ they are cleared judicially from all the consequences that formerly lay on them as in the life of Adam. A very wonderful thing, this, and one that is too often overlooked by us all.

Justification then, as the Epistle to the Romans presents it, not only means a complete clearance from all offences and the condemnation they deserve, but goes to the length of a complete clearance from all the condemnation attaching to our fallen Adamic nature, inasmuch as now, by God's act, we stand in Christ risen from the dead. Blessed be God, for such a clearance as this!

You have not alluded to the righteousness of Christ being imputed to us? Why?

Because that idea is not found in Scripture. There is no difficulty in finding there the righteousness of Christ. That was absolutely perfect, and hence, being without blemish, He was qualified to be the "Lamb" of sacrifice on our behalf. But we are justified by His blood and not by His perfect life. He died for us, but in no place is it said that He kept the law for us. Had He done so we should after all be standing in a merely **legal** righteousness before God; and by that we mean, a righteousness which merely goes to the length of keeping the law of Moses. Our righteousness before God would after all be just that righteousness of the law, of which Moses speaks (see Rom. 10: 5); though worked out, not by ourselves, but by Christ on our behalf.

The righteousness in which we stand is, "the righteousness of faith," described in verses 6 to 9 of that chapter; and that is connected, not with Christ on earth keeping the law for us, but with God raising Him from the dead after He had died for our sins.

But surely righteousness is imputed, for we read in Romans 4 that, "God imputeth righteousness without works," and again that, "it was imputed to him for righteousness. What then do these expressions mean?

If that chapter be carefully read it will be noticed that the **words, counted, imputed, reckoned,**

occur several times. They all three have the same force, being translations of the same word, which is most nearly expressed by the word **reckoned**. "Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness." That is, Abraham was **reckoned righteous** or **held to be righteous** by God, in virtue of his faith. The little word "for" is apt to mislead, as it may suggest the idea of faith being a kind of substitute for righteousness, something which may be transmuted into righteousness. "Reckoned to him as righteousness," more nearly gives the sense. If you have a New Translation (J. N. Darby) with full notes, turn up this verse and consult the footnote as to the translation, which is very illuminating.

The argument of Romans 4, then, is that whether it be Abraham of old, or believers in Christ today, there is only one way by which we may be reckoned righteous before God, the great Judge of all; and that is, by faith without works. **Without works**, mark you! Not even the perfect works of Christ, everyone of them done in righteousness, come in here: another proof, if it were needed, that we are not made righteous by a certain quantity of His law-keeping being imputed to us. What does come in is His death and resurrection. This underlies the whole of the chapter, and is plainly expressed at the end. Read verse 25 and see.

That verse has been taken to mean that just as Jesus died because we were sinners, so He was raised again because we had been justified in His death. Is this a correct view of it?

You have but to read on into Romans 5 to find that it is not correct. Our chapter divisions are sometimes not natural but artificial, breaking into the middle of a paragraph. This is a case in point. He "was raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God."

The interpretation you mention presents our justification as an accomplished fact when Jesus died, and His resurrection to be the consequence of it. But this entirely eliminates our faith from the question; and our faith cannot be eliminated thus, in view of the first verse of chapter 5. His death was in view of our sins, and is **the basis of our justification**; but that is another matter.

His resurrection was, in the first place, the declaration of the blessed fact, that He who stooped under the weight of God's judgment against sin, is for ever clear of it. In the second place, it was in view of the clearance of all who believe in Him.

This we have just been enforcing and illustrating. He was delivered to death with our sins in view: He was raised again with our justification in view. But the justification of each individual only becomes effective as and when they **believe**.