

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN: JUSTIFICATION**

### **The Nature of Justification**

1. *God freely justifies the persons whom He effectually calls.*

*He does this, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins and by accounting them, and accepting them, as righteous. This He does for Christ's sake alone, and not for anything wrought in them or done by them.*

*The righteousness which is imputed to them, that is, reckoned to their account, is neither their faith nor the act of believing nor any other obedience to the gospel which they have rendered, but Christ's obedience alone.*

*Christ's one obedience is twofold – His active obedience rendered to the entire divine law, and His passive obedience rendered in His death. Those thus justified receive and rest by faith upon Christ's righteousness; and this faith they have, not of themselves, but as the gift of God.*

Justification is the central truth of the gospel. It answers the question, "How can I, a sinner, be made right with God?" It is the question that Martin Luther battled with almost 500 years ago from Romans 1:17, and which was the effective beginning of the Protestant Reformation. So there is no more important subject to study. Two passages about justification are Romans 3:21-4:25 and Galatians 2:15-3:16.

(a) **The relationship of justification to effectual calling** (line 1). In the order of salvation God first calls a person and then justifies him (Romans 8:30). Everyone who is so called is also justified.

(b) **An explanation of justification** (lines 2-4). "Justification" is God, as a Judge, declaring that a sinner is righteous before Him. It is the opposite of condemnation (Romans 8:33-34). Justification has to do with our relationship to the law of God. I am judged to be a law-keeper and not a law-breaker. Because God "justifies the ungodly" (Romans 4:5), justification involves two things:

1. "pardoning their sins" or forgiveness (Acts 13:38-39).
2. "accounting them ... as righteous" or declaring they are law-keepers.

There are 2 obvious questions that arise. On what basis does God forgive as He has before declared that the soul that sins shall die (Ezekiel 18:4)? How can God be just if He declares the unrighteous to be righteous, law-breakers to be law-keepers?

(c) **The righteousness by which God justifies the sinner** (lines 5-7).

1. It is *not* "anything wrought in them or done by them". So it is not "faith" or "any other obedience to the gospel". This is how some have interpreted Genesis 15:6 (Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6). They claim that God accepts our faith instead of our perfect obedience to the law. But this is to make justification dependent upon something the sinner does, which is what is everywhere denied (see Romans 3:28, 4:1-6).
2. It is "Christ's obedience". Romans describes it as "the righteousness of God" (1:17, 3:21-22, 10:3, see Philippians 3:9). God is able to justify the sinner because of what Christ has done in His perfect obedience and in His sacrificial death. This righteousness is "imputed" or counted as being ours. God considers the justified sinner to be "in" Christ, and therefore as righteous as Christ is righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ's righteousness can be thought of as a piece of clothing to cover our sin and nakedness (see Grace Hymns 792, verses 1,4,5).

(d) **The Obedience of Christ described** (lines 8-11). Christ's whole work for us can be described as 'obedience' (Romans 5:19, Philippians 2:8). By His obedience Christ satisfies both needs for our justification. In His passive obedience on the cross He has paid the debts we owe to God because of our sins, so that we can be pardoned; in His active obedience in keeping the law, even to the death of the cross, He has obtained a perfect righteousness which is imputed to us.

## **Justification By Faith**

2. *The faith which receives and rests on Christ and His righteousness is the sole means of justification. Yet it is never alone in the person justified, but is invariably accompanied by all other saving graces. Nor is it a dead faith, for it works by love.*

(a) Justification is by **faith alone** (Romans 3:28, 5:1, Galatians 2:16). Why faith and not another grace? It is because it is the peculiar characteristic of faith to *trust* in another person; faith looks to Christ as the only way of being accepted as righteous before God. So it must be emphasized that it is faith alone.

(b) The faith that justifies is **never alone**. This is the emphasis of James 2:14-26, as James deals with those who claim a faith which has never changed their lives. The doctrine of justification by faith never leads to carelessness of living, for it always produces works (see also Galatians 5:6).

## **God is Glorified in Justification**

3. *By His obedience and death Christ paid in full the debt of all those who are justified. By the sacrifice of Himself in His blood shedding on Calvary, and His suffering on their behalf of the penalty they had incurred, He fully and absolutely satisfied all the claims which divine justice had upon them.*

*Yet their justification is altogether of free grace, firstly because Christ was the free gift of the Father to act on their behalf; secondly because Christ's obedience and His satisfying the demands of the law was freely accepted on their behalf; and thirdly because nothing in them merited these mercies.*

*Hence God's exact justice and His rich grace are alike rendered glorious in the justification of sinners.*

All that God does He does for His own glory (Romans 11:36). In the justification of sinners two aspects of God's character are glorified = we see demonstrated their greatness and perfection.

(a) The **justice** of God (lines 1-4). This is brought out most clearly in Romans 3:25b-26. God had pardoned sin under the Old Testament although there had been no proper sacrifice for sin. It was done on the basis of the future sacrifice of Christ. Through His death Christ has fully paid the debt we sinners owe because of the broken law of God. God has fully honoured His law in justifying sinners (Romans 3:31). Justification is therefore God's way of releasing us from the just condemnation of His law, while at the same time honouring all that the law demands. Nothing can show more clearly His "exact justice".

(b) The **grace** of God (lines 5-8). Read Romans 3:24-25a, Titus 3:7. Justification is totally undeserved. The Confession gives three reasons to show this. It is all in Christ and due to His work on our behalf.

## **The Time of Justification**

4. *From all eternity God decreed to justify all the elect, and in the fulness of time Christ died for their sins and rose again for their justification. Nevertheless they are not justified personally until, in due time, the Holy Spirit actually applies to them the benefits of Christ's Person and work.*

This section is against the error of those who teach:

- an eternal justification – it is confessed that God did predestine to justify His people in His eternal decree;
- that sinners are justified when Christ died for them – again it is confessed that Christ's death did lay the foundation for their justification.

Rather, justification does not take place until God has personal dealings with us. Until that time we are in a state of wrath and condemnation (John 3:36, Ephesians 2:3). And no one is justified until he exercises faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **The Sinning Christian and His Justification**

5. *God continues to forgive the sins of all the justified. They can never lose their justification; but they may, by reason of sin, fall under God's fatherly displeasure; in which case, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg God's pardon, and renew their faith and repentance, God will not usually restore them to 'the light of His countenance'.*

(a) The sinner who has put all his trust in Christ never needs to be justified again – he is once and for ever justified before God. There can be no condemnation (Romans 8:1,33-34). Christ has paid the debt for all his sins, past, present and future!

(b) However, the Christian cannot sin without falling under God's "fatherly displeasure". God does not deal with Christians as a Judge, but as a Father. His presence will not usually be enjoyed again without a new acting in faith and repentance concerning that sin (Psalm 32:5, 51:7-12).

## **The Justification of Old Testament Believers**

6. *Believers in the Old Testament were justified in precisely the same way as New Testament believers.*

The great example of this is Abraham. In Romans chapter 4 his justification through faith is clearly laid out (see Genesis 15:6). Thus he is "the father of all who believe" (Romans 4:11-12, see Galatians 3:29). The animal sacrifices, through which they approached God, pointed forward to Christ; and they were accepted because of the sacrifice Christ was going to make in the plan of God. There has only ever been one way of salvation from sin – faith in Christ unto salvation.