

# The Doctrine of Justification 7. Its Objects

by A.W. Pink

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*God justifies the ungodly, not because of anything good in them, but for His own sake, through faith in the blood of the Redeemer.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 43:25, Jeremiah 31:3, John 3:18, Romans 3:19, Romans 4:5, Romans 4:25, Romans 5:6, Romans 8:33, Ephesians 2:3, 1 Timothy 3:16

**Topics:** "Grace Of God", "Justification"

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## Description

A.W. Pink explores the doctrine of justification, emphasizing that God justifies the ungodly, not based on their works but through faith in Christ's righteousness. He clarifies that justification is a legal declaration from God, distinct from the believer's experiential state, and that all humans, including the elect, are born under condemnation until they believe. Pink highlights that justification is not about inherent righteousness but about God's grace extended to sinners, illustrating this with biblical examples like Abraham and the thief on the cross. He stresses that faith is the means by which one receives this justification, underscoring the radical nature of God's mercy towards the most wretched. Ultimately, Pink affirms that God's justification is a miraculous act of grace that offers hope to all who believe, regardless of their past sins.

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## Transcript

### THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

#### 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" (v. 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" (vv. 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 endeavors, 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' (vv. 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.

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