

Justification by Faith

by Charles Finney

Gospel justification is pardon and acceptance with God, based on faith and holiness, not on the grounds of law.

Scripture: Romans 3:20, Galatians 2:16, Ephesians 2:8

Topics: "Faith", "Justification"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the doctrine of Justification by Faith, explaining that individuals cannot be justified by the works of the law but only through faith in Jesus Christ. He outlines the distinction between legal justification and gospel justification, asserting that true justification involves being pardoned and accepted by God based on faith, not on personal merit or adherence to the law. Finney addresses common excuses sinners use to justify their actions, ultimately affirming that faith is the means through which believers receive God's grace and are transformed. He encourages listeners to embrace their identity as justified individuals, highlighting the assurance and peace that comes from faith in Christ.

Transcript

TEXT--"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."--Gal 2:16

THIS last sentiment is expressed in the same terms, in the 3d chapter of Romans. The subject of the present lecture, as I announced last week, is Justification by Faith. The order which I propose to pursue in the discussion is this:

- I. Show what justification by law, or legal justification, is.
 - II. Show that by the deeds of the law no flesh can be justified.
 - III. Show what gospel justification is.
 - IV. Show what is the effect of gospel justification, or the state into which it brings a person that is justified.
 - V. Show that gospel justification is by faith.
 - VI. Answer some inquiries which arise in many minds on this subject.
- I. I am to show what legal justification is.

1. In its general legal sense it means not guilty. To justify an individual in this sense, is to declare that he is not guilty of any breach of the law. It is affirming that he has committed no crime. It is pronouncing him innocent.

2. More technically, it is a form of pleading to a charge of crime, where the individual who is charged admits the fact, but brings forward an excuse, on which he claims that he had a right to do as he did, or that he is not blameworthy. Thus, if a person is charged with murder, the plea of justification admits that he killed the man, but alleges either that it was done in self-defence and he had a right to kill him, or that it was by unavoidable accident, and he could not help it. In either case, the plea of justification admits the fact, but denies the guilt, on the ground of a sufficient excuse.

II. I am to show that by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified. And this is true under either form of justification.

1. Under the first, or general form of justification. In this case, the burden of proof is on the accuser, who is held to prove the facts charged. And in this case, he only needs to prove that a crime has been committed once. If it is proved once, the individual is guilty. He cannot be justified, in this way, by the law. He is found guilty. It is not available for him to urge that he has done more good than hurt, or that he has kept God's law longer than he has broken it, but he must make it out that he has fulfilled every jot and tittle of the law. Who can be justified by the law in this way? No one.

2. Nor under the second, or technical form of justification. In this case, the burden of proof lies on him who makes the plea. When he pleads in justification he admits the fact alleged, and therefore he must make good his excuse, or fail. There are two points to be regarded. The thing pleaded as an excuse must be true, and it must be a good and sufficient excuse or justification, not a frivolous apology, or one that does not meet the case. If it is not true, or if it is insufficient, and especially if it reflects on the court or government, it is an infamous aggravation of his offence. You will see the bearing of this remark, by and by.

I will now mention some of the prominent reasons which sinners are in the habit of pleading as a justification, and will show what is the true nature and bearing of these excuses, and the light in which they stand before God. I have not time to name all these pleas, but will only refer to two of each of the classes I have described, those which are good if true, and those which are true but unavailing.

(1.) Sinners often plead their sinful nature as a justification.

This excuse is a good one, if it is true. If it is true, as they pretend, that God has given them a nature which is itself sinful, and the necessary actings of their nature are sin, it is a good excuse for sin, and in the face of heaven and earth, and at the day of judgment, will be a good plea in justification. God must annihilate the reason of all the rational universe, before they will ever blame you for sin if God made you sin, or if he gave you a nature that is itself sinful. How can your nature be sinful? What is sin? Sin is a transgression of the law. There is no other sin but this. Now, does the law say you must not have such a nature as you have? Nothing like it.

The fact is, this doctrine overlooks the distinction between sin and the occasion of sin. The bodily appetites and constitutional susceptibilities of body and mind, when strongly excited, become the occasions of sin. So it was with Adam. No one will say that Adam had a sinful nature. But he had, by his constitution, an appetite for food and a desire for knowledge. These were not sinful, but were as God

made them, and were necessary to fit him to live in this world, as a subject of God's moral government. But being strongly excited, as you know, led to prohibited indulgence, and thus became the occasions of his sinning against God. They were innocent in themselves, but he yielded to them in a sinful manner, and that was his sin. When the sinner talks about his sinful nature as a justification, he confounds these innocent appetites and susceptibilities, with sin itself. By so doing, he in fact charges God foolishly, and accuses him of giving him a sinful nature, when in fact his nature, in all its elements, is essential to moral agency, and God has made it as well as it could be made, and perfectly adapted to the circumstances in which he lives in this world. The truth is, man's nature is all right, and is as well fitted to love and obey God as to hate and disobey him. Sinner! the day is not far distant, when it will be known whether this is a good excuse or not. Then you will see whether you can face your Maker down in this way; and when he charges you with sin, turn round and throw the blame back upon him.

Do you inquire what influence Adam's sin has then had in producing the sin of his posterity? I answer, it has subjected them to aggravated temptation, but has by no means rendered their nature in itself sinful.

2. Another excuse coming under the same class, is inability. This also is a good excuse if it is true. If sinners are really unable to obey God, this is a good plea in justification. When you are charged with sin, in not obeying the laws of God, you have only to show, if you can, by good proof, that God has required what you were not able to perform, and the whole intelligent universe will resound with the verdict of not guilty. If you have not natural power to obey God, they must give this verdict, or cease to be reasonable beings. For it is a first law of reason, that no being is obliged to do what he has no power to do.

Suppose God should require you to undo something which you have done. This, everyone will see, is a natural impossibility. Now, are you to blame for not doing it? God requires repentance of past sins, and not that you should undo them. Now, suppose it was your duty, on the first of January, to warn a certain individual, who is now dead. Are you now under obligation to warn that individual? No. That is an impossibility. All that God can now require is, that you should repent. It never can be your duty, now, to warn that sinner. God may hold you responsible for not doing your duty to him when it was in your power. But it would be absurd to make it your duty to do what it is not in your power to do.

This plea being false, and throwing the blame of tyranny on God, is an infamous aggravation of the offence. If God requires you to do what you have no power to do, it is tyranny. And what God requires is on penalty of eternal death--he threatens an infinite penalty for not doing what you have no power to do, and so he is an infinite tyrant. This plea, then, charges God with infinite tyranny, and is not only insufficient for the sinner's justification, but is a horrible aggravation of his offence.

Let us vary the case a little. Suppose God requires you to repent for not doing what you never had natural ability to do. You must either repent, then, of not doing what you had no natural power to do, or you must go to hell. Now, you can neither repent of this, nor can he make you repent of it. What is repentance? It is to blame yourself and justify God. But if you had no power, you can do neither. It is a natural impossibility that a rational being should ever blame himself for not doing what he is conscious he had not power to do. Nor can you justify God. Until the laws of mind are reversed, the verdict of all intelligent beings must pronounce it infinite tyranny to require that which there is no power to perform.

Suppose God should call you to account, and require you to repent for not flying. By what process can he make you blame yourself for not flying, when you are conscious that you have no wings, and no power to fly? If he could cheat you into the belief that you had the power, and make you believe a lie, then you

might repent. But what sort of a way is that for God to take with his creatures?

What do you mean, sinner, by bringing such an excuse? Do you mean to have it go, that you have never sinned? It is a strange contradiction you make, when you admit that you ought to repent, and in the next breath say you have no power to repent. You ought to take your ground, one way or the other. If you mean to rely on this excuse, come out with it in full, and take your ground before God's bar, and say, "Lord, I am not going to repent at all--I am not under any obligation to repent, for I have not power to obey thy law, and therefore I plead not guilty absolutely, for I have never sinned!"

In which of these ways can any one of you be justified? Will you, dare you take ground on this excuse, and throw back the blame upon God?

3. Another excuse which sinners offer for their continued impenitence is their wicked heart.

This excuse is true, but it is not sufficient. The first two that I mentioned, you recollect were good if they had been true, but they were false. This is true, but is no excuse. What is a wicked heart? It is not the bodily organ which we call the heart, but the affection of the soul, the wicked disposition, the wicked feelings, the actings of the mind. If these will justify you, they will justify the devil himself. Has he not as wicked a heart as you have? Suppose you had committed murder, and you should be put on trial and plead this plea. "It is true," you would say, "I killed the man, but then I have such a thirst for blood, and such a hatred of mankind, that I cannot help committing murder, whenever I have an opportunity." "Horrible!" the judge would exclaim, "Horrible! Let the gallows be set up immediately, and let this fellow be hung before I leave the bench; such a wretch ought not to live an hour. Such a plea! Why, that is the very reason he ought to be hung, if he has such a thirst for blood, that no man is safe." Such is the sinner's plea of a wicked heart in justification of sin. Out of thine own mouth will I condemn thee, thou wicked servant.

4. Another great excuse which people make, is the conduct of Christians.

Ask many a man among your neighbors why he is not religious, and he will point you at once to the conduct of Christians as his excuse. "These Christians," he will say, "are no better than anybody else; when I see them live as they profess, I shall think it time for me to attend to religion." Thus he is hiding behind the sins of Christians. He shows that he knows how Christians ought to live, and therefore he cannot plead that he has sinned through ignorance. But what does it amount to as a ground of justification? I admit the fact, that Christians behave very badly, and do much that is entirely contrary to their profession. But is that a good excuse for you? So far from it, this is itself one of the strongest reasons why you ought to be religious. You know so well how Christians ought to live, you are bound to show an example. If you had followed them ignorantly, because you did not know any better, and had fallen into sin in that way, it would be a different case. But the plea, as it stands, shows that you know they are wrong, which is the very reason why you ought to be right, and exert a better influence than they do. Instead of following them and doing wrong because they do, you ought to break off from them, and rebuke them, and pray for them, and try to lead them in a better way. This excuse, then, is true in fact, but unavailable in justification. You only make it an excuse for charging God foolishly, and instead of clearing you, it only adds to your dreadful, damning guilt. A fine plea this, to get behind some deacon, or some elder in the church, and there shoot your arrows of malice and caviling at God!

Who among you, then, can be justified by the law?--Who has kept it? Who has got a good excuse for breaking it? Who dare go to the bar of God on these pleas, and face his Maker with such apologies?

III. I am to show what Gospel Justification is.

First, Negatively.

1. Gospel Justification is not the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Under the gospel, sinners are not justified by having the obedience of Jesus Christ set down to their account, as if He had obeyed the law for them, or in their stead. It is not an uncommon mistake to suppose that when sinners are justified under the gospel they are accounted righteous in the eye of the law, by having the obedience or righteousness of Christ imputed to them. I have not time to go into an examination of this subject now. I can only say that this idea is absurd and impossible, for this reason, that Jesus Christ was bound to obey the law for himself, and could no more perform works of supererogation, or obey on our account, than any body else. Was it not his duty to love the Lord his God, with all his heart and soul and mind and strength, and to love his neighbor as himself? Certainly; and if he had not done so, it would have been sin. The only work of supererogation he could perform was to submit to sufferings that were not deserved. This is called his obedience unto death, and this is set down to our account. But if his obedience of the law is set down to our account, why are we called on to repent and obey the law ourselves? Does God exact double service, yes, triple service, first to have the law obeyed by the surety for us, then that he must suffer the penalty for us, and then that we must repent and obey ourselves? No such thing is demanded. It is not required that the obedience of another should be imputed to us. All we owe is perpetual obedience to the law of benevolence. And for this there can be no substitute. If we fail of this we must endure the penalty, or receive a free pardon.

2. Justification by faith does not mean that faith is accepted as a substitute for personal holiness, or that by an arbitrary constitution, faith is imputed to us instead of personal obedience to the law.

Some suppose that justification is this, that the necessity of personal holiness is set aside, and that God arbitrarily dispenses with the requirement of the law, and imputes faith as a substitute. But this is not the way. Faith is accounted for just what it is, and not for something else that it is not. Abraham's faith was imputed unto him for righteousness, because it was itself an act of righteousness, and because it worked by love, and thus produced holiness. Justifying faith is holiness, so far as it goes, and produces holiness of heart and life, and is imputed to the believer as holiness, not instead of holiness.

3. Nor does justification by faith imply that a sinner is justified by faith without good works, or personal holiness.

Some suppose that justification by faith only, is without any regard to good works, or holiness. They have understood this from what Paul has said, where he insists so largely on justification by faith. But it should be borne in mind that Paul was combating the error of the Jews, who expected to be justified by obeying the law. In opposition to this error, Paul insists on it that justification is by faith, without works of law. He does not mean that good works are unnecessary to justification, but that works of law are not good works, because they spring from legal considerations, from hope and fear, and not from faith that works by love. But inasmuch as a false theory had crept into the church on the other side, James took up the matter, and showed them that they had misunderstood Paul. And to show this, he takes the case of Abraham. "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?--And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." This epistle was

supposed to contradict Paul, and some of the ancient churches rejected it on that account. But they overlooked the fact that Paul was speaking of one kind of works, and James of another. Paul was speaking of works performed from legal motives. But he has everywhere insisted on good works springing from faith, or the righteousness of faith, as indispensable to salvation. All that he denies is, that works of law, or works grounded on legal motives, have anything to do in the matter of justification. And James teaches the same thing, when he teaches that men are justified, not by works nor by faith alone, but by faith together with the works of faith; or as Paul expresses it, faith that works by love. You will bear in mind that I am speaking of gospel justification, which is very different from legal justification.

Secondly, Positively.

4. Gospel justification, or justification by faith, consists in pardon and acceptance with God.

When we say that men are justified by faith and holiness, we do not mean that they are accepted on the ground of law, but that they are treated as if they were righteous, on account of their faith and works of faith. This is the method which God takes, in justifying a sinner. Not that faith is the foundation of justification. The foundation is in Christ. But this is the manner in which sinners are pardoned, and accepted, and justified, that if they repent, believe, and become holy, their past sins shall be forgiven, for the sake of Christ.

Here it will be seen how justification under the gospel differs from justification under the law. Legal justification is a declaration of actual innocence and freedom from blame. Gospel justification is pardon and acceptance, as if he was righteous, but on other grounds than his own obedience. When the apostle says, "By deeds of law shall no flesh be justified," he uses justification as a lawyer, in a strictly legal sense. But when he speaks of justification by faith, he speaks not of legal justification, but of a person's being treated as if he were righteous.

IV. I will now proceed to show the effect of this method of justification; or the state into which it brings those who are justified.

1. The first item to be observed is, that when an individual is pardoned, the penalty of the law is released. The first effect of a pardon is to arrest and set aside the execution of the penalty. It admits that the penalty was deserved, but sets it aside. Then, so far as punishment is concerned, the individual has no more to fear from the law, than if he had never transgressed. He is entirely released. Those, then, who are justified by true faith, as soon as they are pardoned, need no more be influenced by fear or punishment. The penalty is as effectually set aside, as if it had never been incurred.

2. The next effect of pardon is, to remove all the liabilities incurred in consequence of transgression, such as forfeiture of goods, or incapacity for being a witness, or holding any office under government. A real pardon removes all these, and restores the individual back to where he was before he transgressed. So, under the government of God, the pardoned sinner is restored to the favor of God. He is brought back into a new relation, and stands before God and is treated by him, so far as the law is concerned, as if he were innocent. It does not suppose or declare him to be really innocent, but the pardon restores him to the same state as if he were.

3. Another operation of pardon under God's government is, that the individual is restored to sonship. In other words, it brings him into such a relation to God, that he is received and treated as really a child of God.

Suppose the son of a sovereign on the throne had committed murder, and was convicted and condemned to die. A pardon, then, would not only deliver him from death, but restore him to his place in the family. God's children have all gone astray, and entered into the service of the devil; but the moment a pardon issues to them, they are brought back; they receive a spirit of adoption, are sealed heirs of God, and restored to all the privileges of children of God.

4. Another thing effected by justification is to secure all needed grace to rescue themselves fully out of the snare of the devil, and all the innumerable entanglements in which they are involved by sin.

Beloved, if God were merely to pardon you, and then leave you to get out of sin as you could by yourselves, of what use would your pardon be to you? None in the world. If a child runs away from his father's house, and wanders in a forest, and falls into a deep pit, and the father finds him and undertakes to save him; if he merely pardons him for running away, it will be of no use, unless he lifts him up from the pit and leads him out of the forest. So in the scheme of redemption, whatever helps and aids you need, are all guaranteed, if you believe. If God undertakes to save you, he pledges all the light and grace and help that are necessary to break the chains of Satan and the entanglements of sin, and leads you back to your Father's house.

I know when individuals are first broken down under a sense of sin, and their hearts gush out with tenderness, they look over their past lives and feel condemned and see that it is all wrong, and then they break down at God's feet and give themselves away to Jesus Christ; they rejoice greatly in the idea that they have done with sin. But in a little time they begin to feel the pressure of old habits and former influences, and they see so much to be done before they overcome them all, that they often get discouraged, and cry, "O, what shall I do, with so many enemies to meet, and so little strength of resolution or firmness of purpose to overcome them?" Let me tell you, beloved, that if God has undertaken to save you, you have only to keep near to him, and he will carry you through. You need not fear your enemies. Though the heavens should thunder and the earth rock, and the elements melt, you need not tremble, nor fear for enemies without or enemies within. God is for you, and who can be against you? "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

5. Justification enlists all the divine attributes in your favor, as much as if you had never sinned.

See that holy angel, sent on an errand of love to some distant part of the universe. God's eye follows him, and if he sees him likely to be injured in any way, all the divine attributes are enlisted at once to protect and sustain him. Just as absolutely are they all pledged for you, if you are justified, to protect and support and save you. Notwithstanding you are not free from remaining sin, and are so totally unworthy of God's love, yet if you are truly justified, the only wise and eternal God is pledged for your salvation. And shall you tremble and be faint-hearted, with such support?

If a human government pardons a criminal, it is then pledged to protect him as a subject, as much as if he had never committed a crime. So it is when God justifies a sinner. The Apostle says, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Henceforth, God is on his side, and pledged as his faithful and eternal friend.

Gospel justification differs from legal justification, in this respect: If the law justifies an individual, it holds no longer than he remains innocent. As soon as he transgresses once, his former justification is of no more avail. But when the gospel justifies a sinner, it is not so; but "if any man sin, we have an Advocate

with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." A new relation is now constituted, entirely peculiar. The sinner is now brought out from under the covenant of works, and placed under the covenant of grace. He no longer retains God's favor by the tenure of absolute and sinless obedience. If he sins, now, he is not thrust back again under the law, but receives the benefit of the new covenant. If he is justified by faith; and so made a child of God, he receives the treatment of a child, and is corrected, and chastised, and humbled, and brought back again. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." The meaning of that is not, that God calls and saves the sinner without his repenting, but that God never changes his mind when once he undertakes the salvation of a soul

I know this is thought by some to be very dangerous doctrine, to teach that believers are perpetually justified--because, say they, it will embolden men to sin. Indeed! To tell a man that has truly repented of sin, and heartily renounced sin, and sincerely desires to be free from sin, that God will help him and certainly give him the victory over sin, will embolden him to commit sin! Strange logic that! If this doctrine emboldens any man to commit sin, it only shows that he never did repent; that he never hated sin, and never loved God for his own sake, but only feigned repentance, and if he loved God it was only a selfish love, because he thought God was going to do him a favor. If he truly hated sin, the consideration that notwithstanding all his unworthiness God had received him as a child, and would give him a child's treatment, is the very thing to break him down and melt his heart in the most godly sorrow. O, how often has the child of God, melted in adoring wonder at the goodness of God, in using means to bring him back, instead of sending him to hell, as he deserved! What consideration is calculated to bring him lower in the dust, than the thought that notwithstanding all God had done for him, and the gracious help God was always ready to afford him, he should wander away again, when his name was written in the Lamb's book of life!

6. It secures the discipline of the covenant. God has pledged himself that if any who belong to Christ go astray, he will use the discipline of the covenant, and bring them back. In the 89th psalm, God says, putting David for Christ, "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips."

Thus you see that professors of religion may always expect to be more readily visited with God's judgments, if they get out of the way, than the impenitent. The sinner may grow fat, and live in riches, and have no bands in his death, all according to God's established principles of government. But let a child of God forsake his God, and go after riches or any other worldly object, and as certain as he is a child, God will smite him with his rod. And when he is smitten and brought back, he will say with the Psalmist, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes. Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now have I kept thy word." Perhaps some of you have known what it is to be afflicted in this way, and to feel that it was good.

7. Another effect of gospel justification is, to insure sanctification. It not only insures all the means of sanctification, but the actual accomplishment of the work, so that the individual who is truly converted, will surely persevere in obedience till he is fitted for heaven and actually saved.

V. I am to show that this is justification by faith.

Faith is the medium by which the blessing is conveyed to the believer. The proof of this is in the Bible. The text declares it expressly. "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." The subject is too often treated of in the New Testament to be necessary to go into a labored proof. It is manifest, from the necessity of the case, that if men are saved at all, they must be justified in this way, and not by works of law, for "by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified."

VI. I will now answer several inquiries which may naturally arise in your minds, growing out of this subject.

1. "Why is justification said to be by faith, rather than by repentance, or love, or any other grace."

Answer. It is nowhere said that men are justified or saved for faith, as the ground of their pardon, but only that they are justified by faith, as the medium or instrument. If it is asked why faith is appointed as the instrument, rather than any other exercise of the mind, the answer is, because of the nature and effect of faith. No other exercise could be appointed. What is faith? It is that confidence in God which leads us to love and obey him. We are therefore justified by faith because we are sanctified by faith. Faith is the appointed instrument of our justification, because it is the natural instrument of sanctification. It is the instrument of bringing us back to obedience, and therefore is designated as the means of obtaining the blessings of that return. It is not imputed to us, by an arbitrary act, FOR what it is not, but for what it is, as the foundation of all real obedience to God. This is the reason why faith is made the medium through which pardon comes. It is simply set down to us for what it really is; because it first leads us to obey God, from a principle of love to God. We are forgiven our sins on account of Christ. It is our duty to repent and obey God, and when we do so, this is imputed to us as what it is, holiness, or obedience to God. But for the forgiveness of our past sins, we must rely on Christ. And therefore justification is said to be by faith in Jesus Christ.

2. The second query is of great importance: "What is justifying faith? What must I believe, in order to be saved?"

Answer. (1) Negatively, justifying faith does not consist in believing that your sins are forgiven. If that was necessary, you would have to believe it before it was done, or to believe a lie. Remember, your sins are not forgiven until you believe. But if saving faith is believing that they are already forgiven, it is believing a thing before it takes place, which is absurd. You cannot believe your sins are forgiven, before you have evidence that they are forgiven; and you cannot have evidence that they are forgiven until it is true that they are forgiven, and they cannot be forgiven until you exercise saving faith. Therefore saving faith must be believing something else.

Nor (2) does saving faith consist in believing that you shall be saved at all. You have no right to believe that you shall be saved at all, until after you have exercised justifying or saving faith.

But (3) justifying faith consists in believing the atonement of Christ, or believing the record which God has given of his Son.

The correctness of this definition has been doubted by some; and I confess my own mind has undergone a change on this point. It is said that Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness. But what did Abraham believe? He believed that he should have a son. Was this all? By no means. But his faith included the great blessing that depended on that event, that the Messiah, the Savior of the world,

should spring from him. This was the great subject of the Abrahamic covenant, and it depended on his having a son. Of course, Abraham's faith included the "Desire of all nations," and was faith in Christ. The apostle Paul has showed this, at full length, in the 3d chapter of Galatians, that the sum of the covenant was, "In thee shall all nations be blessed." In verse 16, he says, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."

It is said that in the 11th of Hebrews, the saints are not all spoken of as having believed in Christ. But if you examine carefully, you will find that in all cases, faith in Christ is either included in what they believed, or fairly implied by it. Take the case of Abel. "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh." Why was his sacrifice more excellent? Because, by offering the firstlings of his flock, he recognized the necessity of the atonement, and that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission." Cain was a proud infidel, and offered the fruits of the ground, as a mere thank offering, for the blessings of Providence, without any admission that he was a sinner, and needed an atonement, as the ground on which he could hope for pardon.

Some suppose that an individual might exercise justifying faith, while denying the divinity and atonement of Jesus Christ. I deny this. The whole sum and substance of revelation, like converging rays, all center on Jesus Christ, his divinity and atonement. All that the prophets and other writers of the Old Testament say about salvation comes to him. The Old Testament and the New, all the types and shadows point to him. All the Old Testament saints were saved by faith in him. Their faith terminated in the coming Messiah, as that of the New Testament saints did in the Messiah already come. In the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul shows what place he would assign to this doctrine: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." Mark that expression, "first of all." It proves that Paul preached that Christ died for sinners, as the "first" or primary doctrine of the gospel. And so you will find it, from one end of the Bible to the other, that the attention of men was directed to this new and living way, as the only way of salvation. This truth is the only truth that can sanctify men. They may believe a thousand other things, but this is the great source of sanctification, "God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." And this alone can therefore be justifying faith.

There may be many other acts of faith, that may be right and acceptable to God. But nothing is justifying faith, but believing the record that God has given of his Son. Simply believing what God has revealed on any point, is an act of faith; but justifying faith fastens on Christ, takes hold of his atonement, and embraces him as the only ground of pardon and salvation. There may be faith in prayer, the faith that is in exercise in offering up prevailing prayer to God. But that is not properly justifying faith.

3. "When are men justified?"

This is also an inquiry often made. I answer--Just as soon as they believe in Christ, with the faith which worketh by love. Sinner, you need not go home from this meeting under the wrath of Almighty God. You may be justified here, on the spot, now, if you will only believe in Christ. Your pardon is ready, made out and sealed with the broad seal of heaven; and the blank will be filled up, and the gracious pardon delivered, as soon as, by one act of faith, you receive Jesus Christ as he is offered in the gospel.

4. "How can I know whether I am in a state of justification or not?"

Answer. You can know it in no way, except by inference. God has not revealed it in the scriptures, that you, or any other individuals, are justified; but he has set down the characteristics of a justified person, and declared that all who have these characteristics are justified.

(1.) Have you the witness of the Spirit? All who are justified have this. They have intercourse with the Holy Ghost, he explains the Scriptures to them, and leads them to see their meaning, he leads them to the Son and to the Father, and reveals the Son in them, and reveals the Father. Have you this? If you have, you are justified. If not, you are yet in your sins.

(2.) Have you the fruits of the Spirit? They are love, joy, peace, and so on. These are matters of human consciousness; have you them? If so, you are justified.

(3.) Have you peace with God? The apostle says, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Christ says to his disciples, "My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you." And again, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Do you find rest in Christ? Is your peace like a river, flowing gently through your soul, and filling you with calm and heavenly delight? Or do you still feel a sense of condemnation before God?

Do you feel a sense of acceptance with God, of pardoned sin, of communion with God? This must be a matter of experience, if it exists. Don't imagine you can be in a justified state, and yet have no evidence of it. You may have great peace in reality, filling your soul, and yet not draw the inference that you are justified. I remember the time, when my mind was in a state of such sweet peace, that it seemed to me as if all nature was listening for God to speak; but yet I was not aware that this was the peace of God, or that it was evidence of my being in a justified state. I thought I had lost all my conviction, and actually undertook to bring back the sense of condemnation that I had before. I did not draw the inference that I was justified, till after the love of God was so shed abroad in my soul by the Holy Ghost, that I was compelled to cry out, "Lord, it is enough, I can bear no more." I do not believe it possible for the sense of condemnation to remain, where the act of pardon is already past.

(4.) Have you the spirit of adoption? If you are justified, you are also adopted, as one of God's dear children, and he has sent forth his Spirit into your heart, so that you naturally cry, "Abba, Father!" He seems to you just like a father, and you want to call him father. Do you know any thing of this? It is one thing to call God your father in heaven, and another thing to feel towards him as a father. This is one evidence of a justified state, when God gives the spirit of adoption.

REMARKS.

I. I would go around, to all my dear hearers to-night, and ask them one by one, "Are you in a state of justification? Do you honestly think you are justified?"

I have briefly run over the subject, and showed what justification is not, and what it is, how you can be saved, and the evidences of justification. Have you it? Would you dare to die now? Suppose the loud thunders of the last trumpet were now to shake the universe, and you should see the Son of God coming to judgment--are you ready? Could you look up calmly and say, "Father, this is a solemn sight, but Christ has died, and God has justified me, and who is he that shall condemn me?"

II. If you think you ever was justified, and yet have not at present the evidence of it, I want to make an inquiry. Are you under the discipline of the covenant?--If not, have you any reason to believe you ever

were justified? God's covenant with you, if you belong to Christ, is this--"If they backslide, I will visit their iniquity with the rod, and chasten them with stripes." Do you feel the stripes? Is God awakening your mind, and convicting your conscience, is he smiting you? If not, where are the evidences that he is dealing with you as a son? If you are not walking with God, and at the same time are not under chastisement, you cannot have any good reason to believe you are God's children.

III. Those of you who have evidence that you are justified, should maintain your relation to God, and live up to your real privileges. This is immensely important. There is no virtue in being distrustful and unbelieving. It is important to your growth in grace. One reason why many Christians do not grow in grace is, that they are afraid to claim the privileges of God's children which belong to them. Rely upon it, beloved, this is no virtuous humility, but criminal unbelief. If you have the evidence that you are justified, take the occasion from it to press forward to holiness of heart, and come to God with all the boldness that an angel would, and know how near you are to him. It is your duty to do so. Why should you hold back? Why are you afraid to recognize the covenant of grace, in its full extent? Here are the provisions of your Father's house, all ready and free; and are you converted and justified, and restored to his favor, and yet afraid to sit down at your Father's table? Do not plead that you are so unworthy. This is nothing but self-righteousness and unbelief. True, you are so unworthy. But if you are justified, that is no longer a bar. It is now your duty to take hold of the promises as belonging to you. Take any promise you can find in the Bible, that is applicable, and go with it to your Father, and plead it before him, believing. Do you think he will deny it? These exceeding great and precious promises were given you for this very purpose, that you may become a partaker of the divine nature. Why then should you doubt? Come along, beloved, come along up to the privileges that belong to you, and take hold of the love, and peace, and joy, offered to you in this holy gospel.

IV. If you are not in a state of justification, however much you have done, and prayed, and suffered, you are nothing. If you have not believed in Christ, if you have not received and trusted in him, as he is set forth in the gospel, you are yet in a state of condemnation and wrath. You may have been, for weeks and months, and even for years, groaning with distress, but for all that, you are still in the gall of bitterness. Here you see the line drawn; the moment you pass this, you are in a state of justification.

Dear hearer, are you now in a state of wrath? Now believe in Christ. All your waiting and groaning will not bring you any nearer. Do you say you want more conviction? I tell you to come now to Christ. Do you say you must wait till you prayed more? What is the use of praying in unbelief? Will the prayers of a condemned rebel avail? Do you say you are so unworthy? But Christ died for just such as you. He comes right to you now, on your seat. Where do you sit? Where is that individual I am speaking to? Sinner, you need not wait. You need not go home in your sins, with that heavy load on your heart. Now is the day of salvation. Hear the word of God: "If thou believe in thine heart in the Lord Jesus Christ, and if thou confess with thy mouth that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

Do you say, "What must I believe?" Believe just what God says of his Son; believe any of those great fundamental truths which God has revealed respecting the way of salvation, and rest your soul on it, and you shall be saved. Will you now trust Jesus Christ to dispose of you? Have you confidence enough in Christ to leave yourself with him, to dispose of your body and your soul, for time and eternity? Can you say

"Here, Lord, I give myself away;

'Tis all that I can do?"

Perhaps you are trying to pray yourself out of your difficulties before coming to Christ. Sinner, it will do no good. Now, cast yourself down at His feet, and leave your soul in his hands. Say to him, "Lord, I give myself to thee, with all my powers of body and of mind; use me and dispose of me, as thou wilt, for thine own glory; I know thou wilt do right, and that is all I desire." Will you do it?

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