

Reconciliation: A Covenant of Grace

by Charles Finney

The sermon emphasizes the importance of justification by faith and the characteristics of a justified person, highlighting the covenant of grace and the discipline of God's lovingkindness.

Scripture: Psalm 89:30, Romans 1:29

Topics: "Justification By Faith", "Covenant of Grace"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the unchanging nature of God's covenant of grace, asserting that once God commits to saving a soul, He does not retract that promise. He argues that true repentance leads to a genuine love for God and a hatred for sin, and that believers can expect God's discipline if they stray. Finney clarifies that justification comes through faith in Christ, not by works, and that this faith is essential for true obedience and holiness. He encourages believers to embrace their identity as children of God and to claim the promises of the covenant without fear or doubt. Ultimately, he calls for immediate faith in Christ as the means to salvation and justification.

Transcript

"The gifts and calling of God are without repentance"--Romans 1:29

The meaning of this Scripture is not that God calls and saved the sinner without his repenting but that God never changes His mind once He undertakes the salvation of a soul.

Some think teaching that believers are perpetually justified is a dangerous doctrine because it will encourage men to sin! If you tell a man that has truly repented that God will give him victory over sin, will that encourage him to commit sin?

If this doctrine inspires any man to commit sin, it only shows that he never did repent. He never hated sin or loved God for His own sake; he only pretended to repent. 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, his heart would break in godly sorrow when he considered that despite all his unworthiness God had received him as a child.

How often the child of God has melted in adoring wonder at the goodness of God, who saved him instead of sending him to hell as he deserved! What would bring him lower in the dust than the thought that, after all God had done for him, he could wander away again when his name was written in the Lamb's book of life!

OUR LOVING FATHER'S ROD

God has promised that if anyone belonging to Christ goes astray, He will use the discipline of the covenant to bring him back. In Psalm 89, God, substituting David for Christ, says, "If his children forsake my laws, 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 lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the things that is gone out of my lips" (Psalm 89:30-34).

Thus, Christians may always expect to be more readily visited with God's judgments if they go astray than the impenitent. The sinner may grow fat and live in riches, all according to God's established principles of government. But let a child of God forsake his God and go after any worldly object and, as certain as he is a child, God will smite him with His rod. When he has been 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" (Psalm 119:71,67). Perhaps some of you have known what it was to be afflicted in this way and that it was good.

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

Justification is by faith. Faith is the medium by which the blessing is conveyed to the believer. The proof of this is in the Bible: "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" (Galatians 2:16).

The subject is too often treated in the New Testament to be necessary to go into a labored proof. It is obvious 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."

JUSTIFYING FAITH

Nowhere does the Bible say that men are justified or saved for faith, as the ground of their pardon. They are justified by faith as the medium or instrument. Faith is confidence in God that leads us to love and obey Him. We are therefore justified by faith because we are sanctified--set apart--by faith. Faith is the instrument of our justification because it is the natural instrument of becoming holy. It brings us back to obedience and therefore is designated as the means of obtaining the blessings of that return. Faith is not imputed to us by an arbitrary act, but it is the foundation of all real obedience to God.

This is why faith is made the medium through which pardon comes. It first leads us to obey God from a principle of love to God. We are forgiven our sins on account of Christ. Our duty is 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.

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. Remember, your sins are not forgiven until you believe. But if saving faith is believing that they are already forgiven, it is believing a think 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.

Neither does saving faith consist in believing that you will be saved at all. You have no right to believe that you will be saved until you have exercised justifying or saving faith.

But justifying faith does consist in believing in the atonement of Christ, or believing the record that God has given of His Son. The correctness of this definition has been doubted, and I confess my own mind has undergone a change of this point.

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. His faith included the great blessing that depended on that event--that the Messiah, the Savior of the world, would 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"--this was faith in Christ. The apostle Paul has shown in detail that the sum of the covenant was "In thee shall all nations be blessed" (Galatians 3:8). 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."

THE MOST EXCELLENT SACRIFICE

Some people argue that in the eleventh chapter 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 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" (Hebrews 11:4).

Why was his sacrifice more excellent? Because he recognized the necessity of the atonement and that "without shedding of blood is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22). Cain was a proud infidel and offered the fruits of the ground as a mere thank-offering for the blessing of Providence. Without any admission that he was a sinner or needed an atonement, he had no ground on which he could hope for pardon.

Can an individual exercise justifying faith while denying the divinity and atonement of Jesus Christ? No! The whole sum and substance of revelation, like converging rays, all center on Jesus Christ and 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 the faith of the New Testament saints did in the Messiah already come.

In the book 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" (1 Corinthians 15:3).

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 you will find that from one end of the Bible to the other 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 make men holy. They may believe a thousand other things, but this is the great source of

sanctification: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). This alone can be justifying faith.

There may be many other acts of faith that may be right and acceptable to God. But nothing is justifying faith except 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.

PEACE LIKE A RIVER

As soon as you believe in Christ with the faith that works by love, you will be justified. You don't have to be under the wrath of Almighty God. You can be justified here and now if you will only believe in Christ. Your pardon is ready, made out and sealed with the seal of heaven. The gracious pardon will be delivered as soon as you, by one act of faith, receive Jesus Christ as He is offered in the gospel.

God has not revealed it in the Scriptures that you or any other individual are justified. But He has set down the characteristics of a justified person and declared that all who have these characteristics are justified.

All who are justified have the witness of the Spirit. They relate to the Holy Spirit. 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 and the Father in them. Do you have this? If you have, you are justified. If not, you are still in sin.

Do you have the fruits of the Spirit? They are love, joy, peace, etc. These are matters of human consciousness, and if you have them, you are justified.

Jesus said to His disciples, "My peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, give I unto you" (John 14:27). And again, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). 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, and of communion? This must be a matter of experience, if it exists. Don't imagine you can be in a justified state without evidence of it. You may have peace filling your soul yet not draw the inference that you are justified.

I remember a time when my mind was so peaceful that it seemed to me as if all nature was listening for God to speak. But I was not aware that this was the peace of God or that it was evidence of my being justified. I thought I had lost all my conviction and actually tried to bring back the sense of condemnation that I had before. I did not draw the inference that I was justified until the love of God was shed abroad in my soul by the Holy Spirit and I was compelled to cry out, "Lord, it is enough, I can bear no more." I don't believe it possible for the sense of condemnation to remain where the act of pardon is already past.

If you are justified, you are also adopted as one of God's dear children, and He has sent His Spirit into your heart. You naturally cry, "Abba, father!" (See Romans 8:15.) He seems to you just like a father, and you want to call Him Father. Do you know this? It is one thing to call God your Father in heaven and another thing to feel toward Him as a Father.

LOOKING WITHIN YOURSELF

Do you honestly think you are justified? Would you dare to die now? Suppose the loud thunders of the last trumpet shook the universe and you see the Son of God coming to judgment--would you be ready? Could you look up calmly and say, "This is a solemn sight, but Christ has died, and God has justified me; who will condemn me?"

Are you under the discipline of the covenant? If not, do you have any reason to believe you were ever 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? If not, where is the evidence that He is dealing with you as a son?

Those of you who have evidence that you are justified should maintain your relationship with 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 many Christians do not grow in grace is that they are afraid to claim the privileges of God's children that belong to them.

If you have the evidence that you are justified, press forward to holiness of heart and come to God with all the boldness that an angel would--know how near you are to Him. This is your duty. Why should you hold back? Why are you afraid to recognize the covenant of grace in its full extent? The provision of your Father's house are ready and free. Are you converted, justified, and restored to His favor, yet afraid to sit down at your Father's table? Don't plead that you are unworthy. This is nothing but self-righteousness and unbelief.

You are unworthy. But if you are justified, that is no longer a barrier. Your duty is to take hold of the promises that belong to you. Take any applicable promise in the Bible to your Father and plead it before Him, believing. Do you think He will deny it? These great and precious promises were given for this very purpose--that you may become a partaker of the divine nature. Why then should you doubt? Come along to the privileges that belong to you and take hold of the love, peace, and joy offered to you in this holy gospel!

If you are not in a state of justification, however much you have 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. For weeks, months, and even years you may have been 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 over, you are in a state of justification.

Are you now in a state of wrath? Believe in Christ. All your waiting and groaning will not bring you any nearer. Do you want more conviction? Do you say you must wait until you pray more? What good is praying in unbelief? Will the prayers of condemned rebels avail? Do you say you are unworthy? Christ died for people like you. He comes to you right now.

Now is the day of salvation. Hear the Word of God: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10:9).

Believe what God says of His Son; believe those great fundamental truths that God has revealed about salvation, rest your soul on it, and you will be saved. Will you trust Jesus Christ to dispose of you? Are you confident enough in Christ to leave yourself with Him for time and eternity?

Perhaps you are trying to pray yourself out of your difficulties before coming to Christ. It will do no good. Cast yourself down at His feet and leave your soul in His hands. Will you do it?

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